

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# *Horizon*

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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AN APPRAISAL: IVY COMPTON-BURNETT AND ELIZABETH BOWEN

By EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

A LATIN PROFILE. By BERNARD BERENSON

'SCOTTIE' WILSON. By E. L. T. MESENS

RELIGION AND TEMPERAMENT. By ALDOUS HUXLEY

WHERE SHALL JOHN GO? IX—SOUTH AFRICA. By HAROLD JENKINS

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# HORIZON

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# COMMENT

IF there is one sentiment which we have tried to avoid in HORIZON it is national pride. But returning after six weeks (about which I hope to report more fully) I felt from Dover to London what can only be described as a patriotic glow. First, because we have no black market with its consequent atmosphere of dishonesty and an immense cleavage between rich and poor. Next, because the new cocktail bar on the Golden Arrow is a cheerful and ingenious affirmation of the right to pleasure, something which is post-war and not merely a return to pre-war, a lyric contribution to the poetry of motion. Then because, unlike the Americans, we do not aspire to the moral leadership of the world while yet unwilling to impose rationing in our own country or to resist demanding far-flung bases from our old allies; we send no goats to Bikini Atoll, nor, like the Russians, do we obstruct every suggestion which brings peace nearer while acting in such a hypnotized way as to induce a war which we will patently lose. On the contrary, by our plan to evacuate Egypt and India, we are performing one of the rare democratic actions of our time. For at last we admit that the right to liberty of the inhabitants of a country overrules the benefits, however well-intentioned, of occupation. In a short time no Englishman need feel that any fraction of the guilt for a lathi charge is his. (It is always surprising that we, who have fought hard for our liberty, are so quick to use the word 'rebel' about those who defend their own when we have taken it away.) Egypt and India, after another ten years of rabid nationalism, will become rich and fascinating countries, as they were in the days of Herodotus; we shall look forward to the visits of their wise men, and I hope they, in return, will not be too difficult over our visas. Occupied countries are like caged animals; who would not rather photograph a wild elephant than ride on a tame one?

Two more bills, looming in the distance, complete the happy picture. A new measure of prison reform and an education bill which eliminates 'school certificate'. Prison reform can come only from a party whose members have not passed through the great public schools and thereby grown accustomed since childhood to the deterrent of a barbarous severity. Flogging,

or being flogged, for many Tories is the first real experience of their life—hence their rebellion against the proposed abolition of the ‘cat’. As for examinations, they should be for rusting Middle-aged, or for very backward groups, like newspaper proprietors. The object of education is to teach the young first to want to learn, then how to learn. They can be left to examine themselves.

To remove complacency I then made a list of some major indications of a civilized community (limited to ten)—I doubt if any country has more than two. Other versions welcome.

1. No death penalty. (The State doesn’t fear its members.)
2. Model prisons. (Criminals can be rehabilitated.)
3. No slums. (The material conditions which produce crime need not exist.)
4. Light and heat supplied free, like water and air. Clothing, nourishment, privacy and medical attention almost free. Transport as near as possible within the reach of all.
5. Vocations for all, not just work.
6. Full toleration of opinion. No censorship of written or spoken words, no tapping of telephones, opening of letters, compiling of dossiers. Special clinics for those who do compile them. No passports, identity cards or money-visas. All travel encouraged.
7. No residue in the laws of harsh and antiquated prejudices of religion, e.g., laws which deal with homosexuality, divorce, bigamy, abortion, etc., to be based on intelligent humanism. This goes also for regulations which affect men bathing without tops, women wearing shorts, etc., and all licensing and Sunday entertainment.
8. The acquisition of property to be recognized as an instinct which is, like the wish to excel, beneficial in moderation, but no one to own more property than he can see, nor the lives of other people, including children—and no children to be rich, which means also that no one would be the poorer for having them.
9. A passionate curiosity about art, science and the purpose of life, akin to the admiration felt in some countries for sport, and a desire to preserve architecture, natural beauty and wild life.
10. No discrimination against colour, race, class or creed.



EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

AN APPRAISAL:

IVY COMPTON-BURNETT AND

ELIZABETH BOWEN

ANY attempt to 'place' a creative writer among his contemporaries should begin with a statement of critical assumptions. This is especially true at the present juncture, since all opinions and beliefs are now in a highly fluid state. Inescapably, the novel reflects the conflicts inherent in a society, and when the latter is unstable the critical apparatus becomes unstable too. So, before I come to consider in detail the work of two modern novelists whom I think likely to be of permanent importance to English literature, I will set out briefly the assumptions that are fundamental to any criticism I care to hazard on the subject of serious fiction.

1. The style, however plain, must be *conscious*, so that the prose establishes, as it were, a *ground-bass* at the back of the reader's mind.

2. The chief persons—those whose characters and fate form the apex of the plot or idea—must possess an appreciable education and/or sensibility. I take this point to be of cardinal importance. Indifference to it, as evinced by certain American novelists, or the deliberate flouting of it by the fashionable Existentialist writers, are responsible for the hollowness and the childish values which afflict much otherwise gifted contemporary fiction. Genuine tragedy at a low level of mentality is a contradiction in terms, and attempts to create it (e.g. Camus' *L'Etranger*) produce an impression of impertinence and moral chaos. Neither Shakespeare nor Racine, nor even Dickens, indulged this fallacy. Light comedy is possible at any level of intelligence and feeling, but the graver issues, though they may, and do, engulf people of all kinds, can only receive artistic expression through the medium of characters who are both highly articulate and thoroughly aware of their situation.

3. As a direct consequence of (1) and (2), the dialogue must proceed at a level above that of everyday life. Flat realism is not only tedious and diffuse, but conceals the idea as a charade the operative word. It is in their speech that the central characters rise

above their actions. (This is particularly noticeable in novels as dissimilar as those of Hardy and Joseph Conrad, where the 'simple, silent', but not insensitive characters express themselves with an Elizabethan eloquence.)

4. It is less the characters than the plot devised to entangle them which reveals the writer's attitude to life—his 'message', social, political or philosophical. The birth of the fundamental idea is probably always accompanied by one or more embryonic characters, or some kind of ill-defined group; but as the plot emerges from darkness into light, it creates the characters—adding, subtracting, altering the recession, and making up the balance of personality as life itself does with real people. Take care of the pounds and the pence will take care of themselves; take care of the plot of your novel and the characters will take care of themselves.

5. Any novel which is to become part of a literary heritage must aim at, and achieve, the effect of poetry, taking the word in its broadest acceptation. The topical, the contingent and therefore ephemeral stuff which all novels contain, must be interfused by an unflagging sense of the mysterious unity of all life. This poetic sense is at once the justification of humanity and the condition to which all art (including music) aspires; all else is as yesterday's newspaper, fit only for the waste-paper basket.

These five assumptions are, I am aware, extreme and intransigent. They will alienate many people today, and those who find them unacceptable need read no further. But I must insist that they are not offered in a spirit of perversity or paradox: they are rooted in a belief in absolute standards of Beauty and the ethical values which these imply. The tradition is as old as history, and has existed wherever an hierarchic society has obtained. Since I believe that civilization is impossible except on the basis of an hierarchic system, I am not concerned for the eventual future of art, and discern no more than a temporary setback for its health in the theories of Social Realism and the neo-Tolstoyan rules of Soviet academies. An art which can be 'understood by anybody' (i.e. anybody who is unversed in that art) is no art at all, and should be called by some other name.

It is possible—perhaps even probable—that the great tradition of art is about to enter upon one of its periods of eclipse. If so, it is a matter for grief, but hardly for despair. In a society without art, it is the society which suffers, not the art which it ignores or

rejects. When the Dark Age is over, another Renaissance will awake the sleeping beauty. We shall not be there to salute her, but at least we can anticipate that moment by rejecting the flimsy rewards held out by those men of easy conscience, the demagogues of today.

★            ★            ★

It may be thought that Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Miss Ivy Compton-Burnett are writers too dissimilar to be brought together in a single essay. It is true that a close comparison of their methods and achievements could scarcely fail to be unfair to both of them. But I hope to show that there are points of resemblance, as well as of contrast, which bring them together as novelists.

That both are women is already important. Disagreeing with Dr. Johnson's low opinion of feminine ability, I find that when women take the trouble to form a literary style, it tends to be a sharper and more flexible instrument than most men command. Gifted with rapidity, the female intelligence is far less given to pedantry and sententiousness. Its characteristic weapons are the adroit phrase, the cunning sentence, the startling yet homely image, the eye which pierces to the heart of a complex personal relationship, and a refreshing freedom from those political obsessions which nag and distort the visions of men. And, for kindred reasons, women writers seem, on the whole, more careful than we to keep within their scope. Nowadays it is a common occurrence to find male novelists describing *milieux* which they have obviously never even visited, simply because they fear the critics' parrot cry: 'Mr. So-and-So leaves too much out of his picture'. If the picture is properly composed and true to its subject, it is complete: what is omitted is strictly irrelevant. Only the Marxian bigot despises Jane Austen for writing of what she knew and ignoring certain aspects of her times (even so, she ignores less than appears on the surface). Both Miss Bowen and Miss Compton-Burnett know their limitations; and knowing them means turning them to account. Miss Bowen marches with the times in the sense that the scenes of her stories are roughly contemporaneous with their publication; while Miss Compton-Burnett's world is the comparatively distant and static one of *circa* 1850-1914. But both novelists exhaust their material; there are no loose ends; their books are sonatas of which the subjects are very thoroughly explored. Fascinated, like all considerable artists, by the richness and



profundity of a single theme, they concentrate all their powers on the gradual unravelment—volume by volume—of the situation to which their temperaments have given them the key. And a precise consciousness of their scope dictates the unit of composition: in Miss Bowen's case, the individual trembling on the verge of irreconcilable ties; in Miss Compton-Burnett's, the family.



The family. . . . The disintegrating effect of two wars has tended to drive novelists away from the direct treatment of this subject. For Miss Compton-Burnett it is not only the source of her ideas—and therefore of her plots—but also the focus of all other relationships. Her characters are, in the first place (as the titles of her novels imply), sons, daughters, wives, brothers, etc., and only in the second place individuals with discrete lives of their own. Like the Greek dramatists, with whom she has in some sort been compared, Miss Compton-Burnett finds in the family the central meeting-place of love and hate; so that in the working out of her books tragedy takes the form of a tightening of the family tie, comedy that of a loosening of the same tie, when those who have enough courage escape into the world. (We never follow them into that world, the advantages of which are taken for granted.) In a scrap of dialogue worth quoting for other characteristic features, Miss Compton-Burnett implies her view of this situation:

“What is a little impatience, hastiness—tyranny, if it must be said, compared with a real isolation and loneliness?”

“I am afraid it must be said, and they are a great deal worse.”

Two more quotations should serve to explain the richness and fascination of the subject to which this novelist devotes her astonishing powers. The first is from the same book (*Daughters and Sons*):

“What I can't understand about that family”, said Rowland, “is how they say what they like all the time, and yet seem to be afraid. Can anyone explain it?”

“No one yet,” said Miss Marcon. “Alfred may be able to presently. But families can seldom be explained, and they make better gossip without any explanation. To know all is to forgive all, and that would spoil everything.”

In the end of these novels we *do* know all, and forgive all, and

everything is spoilt—in the sense that nothing—absolutely nothing—further remains to be said. The material is exhausted, and our (artistic) satisfaction complete. But in the meantime. . . .

The third quotation is from an even later book, *Parents and Children*: “You should not want to know the things in people’s minds. If you were meant to hear them, they would be said.” So much is, in fact, said in these novels, which are nine-tenths dialogue, that the suppressed idea or emotion assumes the importance that in other novelists requires a whole scene, or sequence of scenes, to build up. One of the advantages of Miss Compton-Burnett’s exquisite conversation is that any direct statement of feeling or intention has the force of a violent gesture. The ‘cast’ is always so constructed that there is one character, and one only, who, by making such statements, carries the plot a step forward. Like rocket bombs, these stories proceed by jet propulsion, and the explosion, when at last it occurs, hits those who were least prepared for it.

A society, the members of which are so highly conscious of their interdependence, creates its own destiny; and the rocket bomb becomes a boomerang. If they could, they would leave stones unturned; but their circumstances make this impossible. To them, all life is one long process of more or less painful discovery. ‘When people shut themselves up they cease to separate occasions’; and—with equal inevitability—they become like actors intoxicated by their own eloquence, wit, self-pity and self-love. Indeed, the degree of articulateness displayed by everyone—from servants and children to the tyrant of the household (an invariable figure)—seems alleged, until it is realized that this is a stylistic convention such as every artist has the right to adopt. That everyone in these novels employs the same tone and the same large and scholarly vocabulary does not, strangely enough, impair the vigour of the characterization, except in a few instances where the dimness of the outline is also due to other causes. Like any other artistic convention (e.g., blank verse), this is a means which is amply justified by the end achieved—in this case, the illumination of family life. The purely verbal fascination of Miss Compton-Burnett’s dialogue is a by-product of her preoccupation with the challenge offered by instinct to the formality of strict upbringing; the moral fibre of her creatures is so tough that no peripetia is capable of shaking their determination to improve on what they have just said, in the

interests of exhaustive expression. Gift horses are remorselessly looked in the mouth, proverbs and other received expressions instantly pounced upon and examined for the degree of untruth they are always found to contain.

It must be admitted that these people have plenty to talk about. Murder, incest, suicide, immolation, relentless mental cruelty, self-martyrdom, forgery, burning of legal papers: the worst of which human nature is capable is examined on the level of a solecism, between the dropping of a teacup and the entrance of a maid to collect the fragments. Apart from physical violence and starvation, there is no feature of Hitler's concentration camps which has not its counterpart in the atrocious families depicted in these books. That this is not obvious is due partly to the Cranfordian scene—the quiet, dignified, medium-sized country house standing in what Lady Catherine de Bourgh would have described as a 'small' park, with its village, its rector, its doctor, its retired couple living on savings or a 'genteel sufficiency'. These people live too intensely to have time to question or enjoy their material world. If anything, the roses round the door make them love mother less (and she is seldom lovable, in any case). Money is always important to them, but only in so far as it affects their relationships. They are mildly snobbish. Their sense of social responsibility is implicit, and if lacking is remarked on. Perfect urbanity is the first rule of their intercourse. In these embowered, rook-enchanted concentration camps (the landscape is evoked, hardly ever described) the horrors are made acceptable, but not blunted, by Politeness and Wit. That is, after all, what manners are for; without them, men and women are incomplete. Self-control is rarely lost in these novels, but where it is lost the result is proportionately upsetting to everyone, the reader included. Anger, despair, exasperation, increase the loftiness of the speech, so that the characters seem to exult in the eloquence of their feeling. Thus Dinah Stace, exceeded by grief and by her mother Sophia's demands upon her forbearance, speaks her mind to the housekeeper, whose clumsy inquisitiveness has revealed the family skeleton:

“Oh, well, Patty, if people will listen at doors, we are helpless. . . . We can't allow for that; though it does seem the rule of the house. And we have to talk to Sophia about it. She can't keep it off her mind. How is she to make an effort now, for the first



time in her life? If people will leave no stone unturned to find out what they ought not to know, they must go on turning stones. There are some more to turn. Sophia must be served until the end." ( *Brothers and Sisters*.)

Here exhaustion induced by strong feeling is evident, but so is the control, which shows in the short, measured phrases, and the moderation of the words. But when, as seldom happens, Miss Compton-Burnett decides that the moment is appropriate for somebody to lose his or her head, the tempo becomes very different. In the following speech, taken from the end of *Daughters and Sons*, the author shows what she can achieve by direct means:

"John gave his sister a look and turned away, and she suddenly rose and spoke in a harsh, stumbling voice, in tense, stumbling sentences, which seemed to be torn from some depth within her below the level of speech.

"So Edith is every-thing, is she? Edith, whom you married because you thought she had given you money and would give you more! Edith, whom you married for the paltry sums you thought she would earn and go on giving you! You did not want her for herself! You did not want to earn for your wife! She was to earn for you. And the plan was an empty one after all. It is France who earned the money, France who gave it to you, France who wrote the book that won it! She hid behind Edith's name, because you were jealous of her. Jealous of your daughter! She had to hide because she was afraid of your jealousy! Oh, I know it; I know it all. I know how Mater thought she found out; I saw her tamper with the letters; I saw her read the one addressed to Edith, which was meant for France. I know when she told you; I know when you talked about it; I know how you told each other that Edith would have other money in the end. And Edith knows why you married her. She found it out and did not dare tell you. She did not dare tell her husband that for the time she had only herself to give! She was afraid of the power of your feelings. Oh, people are afraid of you, though you think they are only afraid of me. It is not only of women that people are afraid. What a welter of deceit I have found in my family! What a moral mess I have stumbled on unawares, stumbled on because it was everywhere. First Mater must deceive us all; then she deceived you; then you deceived Edith. Now Edith has begun to deceive you, though I admit she was afraid. France had already deceived you, though I

admit she was afraid. Think of the feeling she had for you, when she wanted to save you the humiliation of not being able to earn; and did not dare to face your jealousy, and so took refuge behind that letter from a stranger! She knew what you wanted; she knew you. And I know you now; I know you. I am not going to do anything more; I am not going to serve you. I am going to live for myself, as you do. You have taught me how to do it, and I have learned. You tell me you have learned the lessons I have taught, and I can tell you the same. It is Edith who will have to serve you, because she cannot work, cannot earn the petty sums that mean so much to you. They are so paltry, these sums of money that mould your life.”

In the finely managed arc of this torrential speech I seem to discern the outlines of Miss Compton-Burnett's literary heritage. Though the resemblances are in some ways misleading, her novels are conceived on the same moral and intellectual level as those of Henry James; behind both writers, at a distance which, because of their excellence, seems less great than it is, stand the vehement yet composed rhetoric of the Grand Siècle, and the later, more bitter, knowledge of Laclos.

Miss Compton-Burnett's progress in her art has been more considerable than might appear, in view of the curious and, no doubt, deliberate uniformity of her novels. For, like a sculptor obsessed by the human figure, she recommences the same task in each successive book, and relies for variety on the endless combinations of spoken language. Her characters are relatively few, and reappear constantly under different names; but each incarnation reveals some new facet of experience. Her first book, *Dolores* (published in 1911), is, indeed, not very characteristic, and is chiefly interesting for the few glimpses of her later style which it contains. A lachrymose, amateurish book, it occasionally startles one with things like this:

“How do you do, Mrs. Cassell?” said Mrs. Blackwood. “We were all beginning to wonder if anything had prevented your coming.”

“How do you know we were, mother? We have none of us said so,” said Elsa.

This foreshadows the portentous domestic tyrants of *Brothers and Sisters*, *A House and Its Head*, and *Daughters and Sons*, as well as the disillusioned, completely intelligent, but dutiful children who suffer under them.

With *Pastors and Masters* (1925) the mature style is already formed in all essential features: it only remained for the artist to exploit the potentialities of so remarkable an instrument. Her own view of the matter is set out, in a modest, but very illuminating, fashion, in the dialogue with Miss M. Jourdain published in *Orion*. But to the present writer the effect of her art recalls the aims of the Cubist movement in painting, at its inception. Like a Picasso of 1913, a Compton-Burnett novel is not concerned with decoration or with observation of the merely contingent, nor is it interested in exhibiting the author's personality or in exploiting a romantic dream. It is constructive, ascetic, low in tone, classical. It inquires into the meanings—the syntactical force—of the things we all say, as the cubist inquired into the significance of shapes and planes divorced from the incidence of light and the accidents of natural or utilitarian construction. These novels contain very few descriptive passages, and none where description is indulged in for its own sake or for Impressionistic reasons; and in this connection it is significant that Miss Compton-Burnett seems to scorn the aid of images. This does not, I think, strike one at the time of reading; it is not until one takes up some other work that one realizes to what extent nearly all novelists rely on metaphor and simile to enliven their picture.

I have described these books as being nine-tenths dialogue, which gives the measure of the space Miss Compton-Burnett allows herself for noting the scene, the aspect and movement of persons, and any comment she may find necessary. All this is reduced to the absolute minimum, and in its abrupt succinctness hardly amounts to more than what one expects to find in the stage directions of a play. The result is something unique, though it has affinities with the tradition of the dramatic legend which was instituted by Plato and includes Fontenelle, Diderot and W. S. Landor.

But it is her zeal for measuring the *temperature* of emotion—the graph described from moment to moment by the action of the plot on the alert sensibilities of her characters—which is responsible both for the continuously witty surface of her writing, and the deeper truth of her picture. Like Henry James, Miss Compton-Burnett is much concerned to preserve an amusing surface, as well as a polite one; and this remains true of the most tragic passages in her books. Indeed, in those which deal with the most frightful



happenings (*Brothers and Sisters, Men and Wives, More Women than Men, A House and Its Head*), the comic relief is more pronounced and more evenly distributed than in the later novels, of which the actual plots are considerably less lurid. But it is her anxious attention to Truth which, more than anything else, gives to her books their quality of timeless relevance. Her wit has many sides, but it excludes absolutely the wisecrack, the smart epigram, the modish or private sally. 'People don't feel as much as you want them to.' This assumption is fundamental to all these novels: it is the arrow on the thermometer which marks 98.4°. And the movement of the book is the to-and-fro rhythm of a tug-of-war between those who do not wish to feel too much, and those who are determined to make them feel more than they can bear—until the rope breaks.

I do not wish to give the impression that I consider these novels faultless. In common with other important artists, Miss Compton-Burnett has a number of failings which are perhaps inherent in her very personal idiom. They are easily described:

1. She tends to fill her canvas too rapidly, and this mistake is aggravated by the perfunctory way in which she describes her characters, so that we are in constant danger of forgetting or confusing them. It must, however, be pointed out that in her later novels this fault is much less apparent.

2. She cannot manage masculine men. Her males are either overtly effete (e.g., Alfred Marcon in *Daughters and Sons*), or possessed by a feline power-mania (e.g., Duncan Edgeworth in *A House and Its Head*).

3. Her plots are not easily remembered in detail, or distinguished one from another. This is not a serious charge, for her emphasis lies elsewhere; but it argues a certain rigidity of imagination, and probably has some connection with my next point.

4. Her subsidiary characters are often (but by no means always) too 'flat'. Even regarded as a chorus, they are too dim in outline and tend, moreover, to be always of the same type.

5. Her chief characters do not develop in the course of the book, they only loom larger or dwindle, according as the author lengthens or shortens her opera-glass.

6. When Action supervenes, she skates over it as quickly as possible, in the manner of Jane Austen. At such moments a kind

of deadly calm descends on the page; which is in a way effective, but tends to spoil what in music is called the balance of parts.

These faults, although they add up to something, do not seriously affect the brilliance and gravity of these amazing books, or the intense satisfaction that arises from submitting oneself to Miss Compton-Burnett's regime. If her novels are tiring to read, that is because the non-stop rallies, the wonderful patness, the immense logical sequences, make it difficult to decide where to put the book down, when it becomes necessary to attend to something else. Once launched on the stream, one must pay due respect to every word, until the end is reached. But although these difficulties render her work no light undertaking for the reader, the reward is proportionate—not only in the illumination of so much in life that other, and perhaps more widely ranging, novelists agree to ignore, but in irresistible laughter. For these books are, one and all, monumentally funny.



Cleverness, with which the great Victorians were so liberally gifted, and which, in all centuries until the present, was accepted as the nervous system of the intellect, has fallen into disrepute in England (but not, however, in Scotland or Ireland). This distrust of nimble-mindedness has naturally accompanied the decline in elegance and quality and the admiration for mediocrity, which are the inevitable outcome of an unjustified belief in 'natural' equality. In public life this tendency led to preferring Mr. Baldwin to Lord Curzon—a course the results of which most people now agree to deplore; while in matters of art it is, perhaps, not surprising that a public which cannot respect Bartók, Hindemith and Picasso should find it easier to applaud John Ireland, E. J. Moeran and Stanley Spencer. Where literature is concerned, the distinction is not so clear; but it remains true that to call a novelist clever is tantamount to accusing him or her of superficiality or of under-hand appeal to a reactionary minority.

Both Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Miss Compton-Burnett are extremely clever, though in different ways. The latter, as I hope I have conveyed, enjoys a special ability akin to that of a logician or a statistician; and the beauty of her books arises from the harmony and symmetry of a carefully constructed world. Miss Bowen, on the other hand, is clever in the generally accepted sense of the word:

her style, at once smooth and sparkling, is constantly tasselled with fresh and startlingly apt images; in narrative she is mistress of the oblique and suggestive; her dialogue is economical, but highly characterized; her plots (described by herself as 'the knowing of destination') are sufficiently ingenious and perfectly adapted to the idea; and she is supremely sensitive to the poetic moment. As her recently published *Notes on Writing a Novel* show, she is as highly conscious an artist as Miss Compton-Burnett; but the reader who is uninterested in technique will be less aware of this fact, in reading one of Miss Bowen's novels or stories, because her method of rendering life is not (as painters say) pushed nearly so far. She stands in the same relation to Miss Compton-Burnett as Vuillard stands to Braque, or Sickert to Ben Nicholson.

Miss Bowen's scope of reference has a wider variety than Miss Compton-Burnett's, but whatever she writes of she knows. It is the same world—that of highly educated, civilized people—but altered and extended by the general loosening up and overlapping that have taken place in the last thirty years. A single sentence from one of Miss Bowen's most recent stories nicely implies the point of view from which her comment originates:

"As you know, I was at Sandyhill yesterday: they are taking two more of cousin Rosanna's servants, so she has decided to close some more of the house, including that little ante-room through to the library."

A less careful novelist would probably have written simply 'the library'; it is that little ante-room which shows, not only how completely Miss Bowen dominates her ambience, but her precise awareness of the visual situation offered, at all points, by her choice of scene. For, just as Miss Compton-Burnett is essentially an *ear*, Miss Bowen, despite the unquestionably real quality of her dialogue, is above all an *eye*. Her business is with the complexities of the heart, light with perceptive wonder, or heavy with some burden of unwelcome knowledge. But always the visual accompaniment of emotion is what gives to that emotion its force and colour, and so fixes it in our minds. The scene, however fleeting, is always *set*, the characters may not give voice to their thoughts, but a sudden sunbeam, a shape of cloud, a sly look, a door ajar, a smouldering cigarette—these speak for them.

Like Miss Compton-Burnett, then, Elizabeth Bowen exhausts her material, but in pursuit of a very different theme. This—to put



it roughly—is the conflict between Innocence and Guilt (using those words in the Christian sense). It is the same theme which fascinated Henry James in so many stories, from *The American* to *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. I say ‘conflict’, but ‘attraction’ better describes this most poignant of all situations; and it is in the corruption of guileless persons by those who simultaneously love and hate them that Miss Bowen finds her clue. Innocence is not the prerogative of girls, but although she has portrayed at least two innocent males (Colonel Bent in *The House in Paris*, Major Brutt in *The Death of the Heart*), it is natural that women should be her main target. Intense feeling—perhaps the most intense *personal* feeling he ever knew—kept Henry James at a respectful distance from Daisy Miller, from Milly Theale and Maggie Verver. Miss Bowen takes the analysis a step further, into the dead centre of the personality, exploring that distressful limbo which rings with the faint cries of those whose trust has been betrayed. She is adept at conveying to us the fateful calm in which, at the outset of her novels, the heroine waits for something to happen. And it is always the worst that happens—the humiliation that injures the soul so much more direly than physical rape.

Heiss mich nicht reden, heiss mich schweigen,  
Denn mein Geheimnis ist mir Pflicht;  
Ich möchte dir mein ganzes Innre zeigen,  
Allein das Schicksal will es nicht.<sup>1</sup>

Portia (*The Death of the Heart*), Emmeline (*To The North*), Lois (*The Last September*), Karen (*The House in Paris*): these fine-grained creatures—*jeunes filles en fleur* trembling on the brink of ‘life’—are the descendants of Mignon, but for them fate (*das Schicksal*) is less foreseen. They all experience the heartbreak which is not (save in one instance) irreparable, either through the insouciance of philanderers (Portia, Emmeline, Karen), or through the selfish conventionality of their immediate surroundings (Lois). Evil, as a motive, has not in these novels the impersonal, terrifying power, working *from outside*, that it acquires in the work of François Mauriac or Graham Greene; but its precipitation in the alembic set a-boil by a chance encounter is the measure of Miss Bowen’s seriousness as a critic of life, and of her importance in the history

<sup>1</sup> ‘Compel me not to words, but rather to silence, for to keep my secret is a duty. Would that I might reveal to you my inmost heart; yet fate forbids me.’

of English fiction. For it should be noticed that her most characteristic creations are distinctively English: one would not expect to find Portia or Emmeline or Lois in a Latin country, nor yet in the America of today.

As if to defend the subtlety of her theme, Elizabeth Bowen's plots are usually simple and well defined; unlike Miss Compton-Burnett's they are impossible to forget or to confuse one with another. Uninterested in complexity for its own sake, she never attempts a sub-plot, and the many subsidiary lives which surround the object of attention are not allowed to engage too much of the reader's interest. Nevertheless, the air in these books is easier to breathe than that of Miss Compton-Burnett's secret sessions. Miss Bowen enjoys a large cast: her people and places are open on all sides. There is a general air of busy-ness, of work in the background; light and space surround her characters, even in their tenser moments. These novels are full of movement, in the literal as well as the figurative sense, and this is perhaps why we never feel crowded out of the page—as we sometimes do in a novel by Miss Compton-Burnett.

Though true of all her books, the above assertions need to be modified in the case of what I consider Miss Bowen's finest achievements: *The Last September* and *The House in Paris*. The first of these is an idyll, and therefore more static than, for instance, *To the North*. The setting has some of Miss Compton-Burnett's enclosed quality. But the discursive style, light and quick as a dragonfly, dispels any sense of difficulty. Perhaps because this is an early book, a slight self-consciousness mars the surface; but the picture of an Anglo-Irish country house, spell-bound in the lovely autumnal calm that precedes its extinction, could hardly be better done. The double tragedy, with which the book ends, completes the structure without weighing it down. Miss Bowen's debt to Jane Austen shows here (more clearly than in her first novel, *The Hotel*, which happens to be lighter in tone) in an uncommon ability to treat tragedy on the same level as comedy. This could not always be a suitable impression to produce; that she has chosen it here is an example of her cleverness in discerning the exact tone of feeling with which Lois, her father and mother and her lover, will respond to events.

'People do not feel as much as you want them to.' Miss Bowen would not agree to that, and in her most artistically successful—

her most mysterious and poetical—novel, *The House in Paris*, she gives us the full range of her subtle imagination. In this extraordinary and very beautiful book, the innocent and the guilty are less sharply distinguished than elsewhere in Miss Bowen's work, and the atmosphere is more sinister. Although there is plenty of movement, the dark little house of Mme. Fisher dominates the whole book and casts its ambiguous shadow across the Channel into the sunlit, spacious, everyday world of the Michaelis family, which is the author's natural *milieu*. The contrast is most skilfully suggested, and its influence, like that of a leit-motif, knits together into a plausible whole the dramas of the two children, strangers to one another, shut up together for a whole day; of Karen and Max Ebhart; of Max and Mme. Fisher; of Max and Naomi Fisher: until the carefully controlled surface of the book is felt to be underpinned by one of those cat's-cradles which, in life, give rise to exclamations like: 'How small the world is!'

The plot itself has the fascinating ambiguity of the supernatural; caught up in something larger than themselves, outdistanced by their own acts, the characters rise to their creator's occasion in words that have the precise eloquence we have noticed in Miss Compton-Burnett. It was a master-stroke of imagination to have made the children, at the moments of crisis in the story, appear less innocent than most of the adults who surround them. (If we feel sometimes that these children use expressions which are beyond their years, it is because Miss Bowen's dialogue is less stylized than that of Miss Compton-Burnett, who presents children in the same light.) And when words fail them at last, and they cling together with tears of disappointment and desolation, that is the author's moment of poetry—the best among the many she has imagined, both in this and other books.

*The House in Paris* is Miss Bowen's largest, most far-reaching novel to date. It was eclipsed in public esteem by the later *Death of the Heart*, which is more direct, more scathing, and more consistently amusing. In a sense it is its author's most *spirited* book. Miss Bowen has always been able to make us laugh aloud by her portraits of second-rate people. Mark Linkwater (*To the North*), Mrs. Vermont and Livvy (*The Last September*), are observed with the virulent exactitude of extreme distaste. The results are in the best tradition of feminine humour; but it is not till we come to the dreadful Heccomb family, in *The Death of the Heart*, that we

find Miss Bowen really stamping on the accelerator. The section of this long novel entitled 'The Flesh' is, indeed, appallingly funny. The moral shoddiness, the callous opportunism, the tastelessness, the threadbare emotional background of this very ordinary English household of the provincial middle-class, are rendered with a technical brilliance that astonishes. But it is, I think, possible to feel that the author has overweighted her book here: the last section is too short for what has gone before. My final impression of this novel is that it suffers from the author's having enjoyed herself too much in it: the control is less perfect than in *The House in Paris*, the invention spread thinner, the whole conception less poetically bold.

Though seen through a woman's eyes, the men in these novels are more various than those of Miss Compton-Burnett. They tend, it is true, to be definitely either gentlemen or cads (Miss Bowen makes no bones about the reality of this distinction, which is part of her view of life); but there are intermediate types, such as Max Ebhart and Julian Tower, and on these she expends the best of her analytical subtlety. The following passage conveys, I think, her method of getting round a character:

'In fact, it was less the niece than the uncle that worried Julian: something in him that would not bring off the simplest relationship, that could be aware of any relationship only as something to be brought off; something hyperconscious of strain or falsity. This descent of an orphan child on his life might have been superficially comic, or even touching. But the disheartening density of Proust was superimposed for him on a clear page of Wodehouse. The poor child's approximation to what she took to be naturalness parodied his own part in an intimacy. She mortified him on his own account and on account of the woman so dreadfully nascent in her immaturity: he confronted again and again in her look, as she chattered and romped, the unavowable anxiety of the comedian. He was estranged from her, as though she were transparent, as he was estranged from almost all women, by a rather morbid consciousness of fraternity. After three days of her company, he felt like a pane of mean glass scrubbed horribly clean, like a pool dredged of its charming shadowy water-weeds. Those inexactitudes of desire that sent him towards Cecilia, those bright smoky movements of fancy became remote and impossible. Sobriety, peopled with nudes, became unseemly as a Turkish bath; he could look nowhere without confusion, least of all at himself.' (*To the North.*)



Miss Compton-Burnett would, almost certainly, have contrived this impression by a cross-fire of argument; but it should not be assumed (as it so often is) that dialogue is *necessarily* superior, as a method of exposition, to discursive analysis. Dialogue is, of course, always more *dramatic* than narrative, but as long as this is taken into account in planning the layout of the book, there is no moral obligation to put into dialogue what you prefer to explain in 'your own' words.

Miss Bowen's method is the traditional one; in this, as in other features of her technique, she is the reverse of an experimental writer; her originality—like Charlotte Brontë's—derives from poetic vision and a completely sane grasp of the human mystery. Both of these qualities are displayed at their most arresting in her descriptive paragraphs, whether these concern people or natural appearances.

'Mme. Fisher was not in herself a pretty old lady. Waxy skin strained over her temples, jaws and cheekbones; grey hair fell in wisps round an unwomanly forehead; her nostrils were wide and looked in the dusk skullish; her mouth was graven round with ironic lines. Neither patience nor discontent but a passionate unresignation was written across her features, tense with the expectation of more pain. She seemed to lie as she lay less in weakness than in unwilling credulity, as though the successive disasters that make an illness had convinced her slowly, by repetition. She lay, still only a little beyond surprise at this end to her, webbed down, frustrated, or, still more, like someone cast, still alive, as an effigy for their own tomb. Her illness seemed to be one prolonged mistake. Her self looked, wildly smiling, out of her body: what was happening in here was too terrible to acknowledge; she had to travesty it and laugh it off. Unserene, she desperately kept her head.' (*The House in Paris*.)

That is clever, but not *merely* so: the writer, it is clear, is not enjoying the spectacle, but feeling with her object, and intensely. My next quotation, from a book which is not a novel at all, has a different aim: but it would not be so beautiful if it were not also as accurate and concrete as the picture of Mme. Fisher.

'In the woods round the house there are rookeries. In September, after harvest, the rook's existence concentrates feverishly: after sunset they cross the sky over the house in their black thousands, back from the stubblefields. Their swirling, diffused pattern has an

intense core; their return has succeeding movements, like a long dance. They pivot on one another in wide whorls, dissolve in the glaring twilight, look like a black snowstorm. Their cries fill the upper silence; for minutes together a tree is charged with them and rustles with them, then they spill out to make their pattern again. Slowly the darkness smoking out of the trees absorbs them; for a long time stragglers continue to cross the sky; it is quite dark before the last cry is heard.' (*Bowen's Court.*)

The fascination exercised by her novels is apt to make one forget that Miss Bowen is also a voluminous writer of short stories. Of these, the longest are also distinctly the most successful. *The Disinherited*, for instance, belongs to the best of her work. But she is the kind of writer who needs space for her best effects, and although her shorter *nouvelles* are executed with epigrammatic verve and adroitness, their qualities tend to be of the magazine order. If one regrets these *tours de force*, it is because, in a writer of Miss Bowen's attainments, one resents any lowering of standards; also—and more importantly—because the faint whiff of vulgarity which rises from the pages of a volume like *Look at all Those Roses* can also be discerned, as a disintegrating factor, in *The Death of the Heart*.

However, in her latest collection of stories, *The Demon Lover*, this disheartening fault is altogether to seek. Indeed, I wonder if Miss Bowen has ever written better, or risen to greater heights of imaginative excellence, than in things like *The Happy Autumn Fields* (she manages the supernatural without a hint of whimsy), *The Inherited Clock*, *Ivy gripped the Steps*, and *Sunday Afternoon*. In the last-named story she joins hands with Miss Compton-Burnett, whose style may be said, without derogatory intent, to have influenced the whole tone of the dialogue. Yet 'influence' is probably the wrong term to use here: mature writers do not imitate those with whom they have not already more than a little in common, and it is fairer to regard Miss Bowen and Miss Compton-Burnett as complementary to one another in the positions from which each has chosen to evolve her complex, but neatly exhaustive, art.

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Wider in scope, but less perfect than Jane Austen, superior to Susan Ferrier (whom in many ways she strongly resembles), at her

best the equal of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Bowen is already assured of a superior place in any civilization capable of appreciating, say, *Middlemarch*. The rich background of Anglo-Irish life from which she springs must be presumed in the main responsible for her extraordinary gifts: there is little object in probing further in this direction. A dedicated novelist, she adds, in each successive book, to the private history of English life in our times.

Miss Compton-Burnett's value is easier to assess, because she has set herself a more special, and perhaps on the whole a still harder task. Though her scene is apparently so confined, the moral implications of her art reach into every corner—not only of her own world, but of those whose existence she only implies. That is the advantage of the high degree of 'abstraction' involved by her method; it achieves universality by dint of excluding what is not essential to the completeness of the design. Like an expert Piquet player, she prefers the bird in her hand to the dubious number she might pick up in the *talon*. The results are self-evident, timeless, and so proof against the hysteria of fashion and the blight of political theory. The writer who addresses himself to the present, in a narrow sense, incurs a more or less speedy oblivion. There will always be artists who prefer this course, for the sake of its obvious advantages; but there is, as yet, no law (at least in England) which compels them to do so, and those who are prepared to face neglect and vulgar abuse in defence of some profounder, or more esoteric, vision of life, may reasonably hope to awake a response in generations as yet undreamed of.

## BERNARD BERENSON A LATIN PROFILE

CARLO died this morning between four and five, and thus came to an end a friendship of fifty years. It is now 14 January 1941, and the last time I saw him was in May 1940. I passed the rest of that month and the first days of June in Rome. When I got back here, war against France and England had been declared, and as we were notoriously friendly to both these powers, a ban of excommunication had secretly been promulgated against us by the elders, not of Israel, but of the Florentine 'Highlife'. I had not

expected Carlo to submit. He did. He preferred their society to ours. Worse still, he took no means—it would have been easy enough—to let me know by word or sign that he was sorry yet could not afford to be cut by all the nice people. I should have understood, regretted, condoned. Worst of all, he, who had been so friendly to France and England because of every material and social and society interest, began to talk, and even to write letters abroad, expressing his full sympathy with the programme and hopes of the 'Axis powers'.

I confess I felt bitter, for the only people who can hurt me are those whom I have loved and trusted. Others can do me material harm, malign and calumniate me, and drive me to defend myself. I feel no resentment, no indignation. My moral sense is not insulted.

Yet, what other conduct could I have expected of Carlo Placci! So completely was he a social being, that to him death itself would have seemed preferable to being boycotted by the people in whose midst he was living. In the Cannibal Islands he would have been a cannibal, and would have talked as glibly in the defence of cannibalism as our Southern clergy before the Civil War spoke of their peculiar institution, God-ordained slavery. During the Paris of the Dreyfus affair, Carlo, when there, out-heroded the worst Herods of Anti-Dreyfusism with the furious defence of their cause. True there was an attenuating circumstance. He was head over heels in love with Mme. Jean de Montebello, one of the chief prophetesses, if not the Deborah, of that cause. The Great War found him in Munich, frequenting the elegant salons of that capital of good beer and bad art. He was expecting his government, a member of the *Triplice*, to join in with Germany, and on the anthropological principle of 'my country right or wrong', and being always ministerial in foreign relations, this notorious francophile, accompanied to the station by 'all' Munich, waved his hat as the train was starting, and shouted 'à bientôt à Paris'. And during that other period while the Libyan campaign was on, we did not see him while it lasted. This happened when he was suffering from a nervous breakdown, on which score it was easy to forgive him.

This time I smarted, and smarted so much that I swore I'd never see him again if we survived this war. Then I began to hear how unhappy he was over things in general and over our broken



friendship. More recently, he wrote a touching letter to my wife, and I spoke of him to Elisabetta de Piccolellis in a way that, if reported to him, would please him.

I forgot to add that we were together in Paris during the so-called Peace Conference. The Fiume affair came up, and although he hated it himself, he went about among acquaintances explaining that, born a Russian subject, son of a noted nihilist, I was brought up as an enemy of bourgeois society, and was a formidable Bolshevik propagandist and secret agent in one. And that was why I opposed Italy's most just, most sacred, most invincible claims to a bit of her own territory without which poor Italy could exist only miserably, exposed to every danger of aggression and invasion.

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When I first went out in Florence—it was in the spring of 1889—I heard everywhere of Carlo Placci, but did not come across him. My curiosity was excited as is everybody's about a name grown familiar but without sufficient substance behind it. Unexpectedly, a year or two later, I discovered him at Vernon Lee's. It was evening. The light was dim. I got no clear impression of his features, but they seemed pleasant, and friendly. The voice was mellow, beautifully pitched, with a seductive timbre.

To my surprised gratification he looked me up the very next afternoon in my eyrie some hundred and thirty steps up in Lungarno Acciaiuoli, and we had a long talk. I cannot recall about what. Nor can I recollect how soon acquaintance flowered into friendship, and friendship into intimacy. He pulled me into his circle, not only inviting me to his house, then presided over by his mother, assisted by a sister and by a Miss Gibson, an old Englishwoman who had been their governess, but he made a point of introducing me to all his friends whether Florentine, Italian or foreign, who enjoyed his hospitality. My gregarious propensities would have succeeded surely in finding satisfaction of some sort, and, for all I know, more profitable perhaps and even more suitable; but as a matter of fact I owe most of my social and nearly all of my society contacts to Carlo. He was generosity itself in passing me from friend to friend, and never could I discover in him the least desire to monopolize or to keep one away from others. Nor did he expect gratitude or compensation,

as though he had sacrificed certain rights to the people he brought together. I have had acquaintances who, after decades, could never forget that they had introduced me to a person who had become a vital factor in my life. These acquaintances are like the character in a French comedy who ejaculates: 'Je vous ai prêté cinq francs, je ne l'oublierai jamais!'

Carlo was unlike all that; but there were drawbacks to his way of bringing people together. He prepared the ground by extravagant praise of the newcomer, which often suffices to create a prejudice against the latter. Carlo was not only apt to stir reaction against his claims for the new friend he proposed introducing, but, more often than not, to rouse resentment by something in his tone implying that you were altogether inferior to the person he was going to present.



A similar tone, far more aggressive, he frequently, in truth nearly always, took when the conversation was about politics in general but in particular about international affairs, when addressing himself to us outsiders who had not his access to foreign office men of all countries and his acquaintance with their secrets. As a matter of fact, the utmost he could substantiate was knowing this evening what the newspaper would print early next morning. Perhaps there were exceptions. I suspect that at times ministers, and even ambassadors, used him as a lie carrier.

Be it so or not, with increasing years, like the tart in the story of Maupassant *qui n'aimait que dans les Affaires Étrangères*, Carlo got more and more to divide his acquaintances into diplomats all glorious, and outsiders who could but weep and gnash their teeth for being excluded. He persuaded himself, I believe, that he was one of the chosen, and his most sacred privilege, the one that meant most to him, was a diplomatic passport he had from his government. The innocent vanity of a rich and idle man! Did not his mother, the blue-eyed Castillo-Aztec Mexican lady, widow of a banker from Faenza, did she not speak of this son as *il ministro degli affari inutili*, minister of affairs that do not count? He would not take it that way, but expected us to receive his pronouncements and foretellings in dead earnest.

Time and time again he would begin with an offensive-defensive 'of course you will not believe, but take it from me'.

At other times, when he was most aggressive, it occurred to one to suspect that he was provoking us so as to draw us out and thereby come to some bit of gossip that his interlocutor might have picked up, once in a blue moon, from some transient diplomat. Later he confessed that he liked to 'put fleas into people's ears' to see what would happen.

Needless to add that his political views were based on neither economics nor sociology nor history, but were a matter of the *œil-de-bœuf* and the alcove as in St. Simon. And, like that prince of memoir writers, he had his *entrées* everywhere, and was, of course, much more travelled. Wherever he went, kings and queens, dukes and duchesses, rejoiced to see him. In Brussels, as he once drove off in a royal carriage to dine at the palace, the hotel people asked his faithful Giuseppe: 'Who is your master, anyhow?' In a drawling Sicilian voice came the answer: '*Il mio padrone non è nessuno, ma tiene delle buone relazioni*'. (My master is nobody, but has important acquaintances.)



He retained his early reputation of being genial, amusing and entertaining. As a guest he was so perfect that people used to say he spoiled the trade, *qu'il gâtait le métier de visiter*. He could condescend to parlour tricks, to imitations of types and even of individuals, but these never unkindly. He could be comical at the piano. He could organize theatricals and take the principal part in them. He could carry on games with children of all ages and keep them panting with pleasure.

Perhaps he felt that he was paying enough with his wit and humour and brightening up, and need not return hospitality. His mother used to keep open house, and few foreigners or strangers passing through Florence failed to appear at her board. When this delightful Mexican, whom some of us fondly called Vitzli-Putzli, died, Carlo was already well on in the fifties. Hitherto he had found no occasion for forming habits of spending, not on clothes and extras, but on bread and butter and butcher's meat, and the other realities of daily life. Without such habits formed and refined before the threshold of old age, people are awkward about spending, and easily get the reputation of being close, and at times deserve it because of their miserliness.

Well, Carlo had not learned to spend on ordinary things,

although I am sure he too was most free with his charities. He received less and less in the home where his mother had entertained so largely—be it remembered not for herself, but for him.

When abroad, say at St. Moritz when all were living at hotels, he never sat down to a meal of his own, and although he could have afforded as much as anyone to feed and drench a dozen people at a time, he never did. And I discovered one fine day that it was not naïve thoughtlessness, as I had supposed, but calculation. He told me, with a grin of satisfaction, that he would wait till the fag end of the season, and invite the last survivors to a tea at Hanselmann's.

So reluctant was he to empty his pockets that years after everybody else who could afford it had a motor car, he went without. He would come to our house every few days, and always telephoned to inquire whether our car might not happen to be in town and bring him up. This got to mean sending for him. As he could afford it better than many others, I finally lost patience and made him get a vehicle of his own. When he got it he treated it as gingerly as if it was a young wife in her first pregnancy. There was always a sufficient reason why it was not in condition to climb up the hills to take us out for a walk, and why it would be preferable to use my car for that purpose.

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I said he came every few days to lunch or dine. When to the first, it was followed by a walk, during which *en tête-à-tête* he could be, and nearly always was, as reasonable as he was apt to be aggressively provoking in company. Boasting constantly of his tact and society experience, he could be, and quite deliberately so, the bull in the china shop, or worse. No master of jiu-jitsu knew one's weak spots better; no one could get one on the raw as he did; and always in company, and at my own table. I cannot recall such behaviour on his part when we were alone together, he and I.

Singular how company goes to people's heads like bad drink! It made Placci jeer and sneer and cavil and quibble and boast, just because he could not sustain a cool discussion of current events in the presence of witnesses. It turned D'Annunzio into a performing ape. He who was such delicious company when you had him to yourself, talking with the greatest naturalness and self-forgetfulness, talking always impersonally of literature, of poetry, of



books, and with keenest zest of words, rare and sonorous words which he would caress as a jeweller caresses precious stone—this same D'Annunzio was not the same when another man was present; and if it was a woman, and a society woman at that, he lost interest in everything except in the impression he was making. Deplorable as this seemed to me, women did not feel it. On the contrary, I have seen some of the most delicate, charming and intelligent of women subdued, enticed, bewitched and confessing that they could not resist him.

To return to Placci, his mother and sister, when they saw us getting intimate with him, warned us that he would behave to us as he did to them, that with intimates he could be quarrelsome, tiresome, and even offensive. And he was. Yet when driven to exasperation and on the point of refusing to see him again, I would, as it were, take a 'last ride' and return feeling that I could not split with a character who could draw one out so caressingly, hanging on one's lips, anxious to let no word pass unappreciated, putting in his own in a way that would elicit one's best.

Never shall I forget a walk we took more than thirty years ago over the Sibilla range on the descent to Ascoli. The day had been quarrelsome, and Carlo had called out the worst in me. Perhaps it was the fault of the *scirocco* lowering over the stewing pan that is the plain of Norcia. By the time the car had brought us to the top, it had turned fresh. The road was barely completed, and, as yet, so little used that it was grassgrown. We got out and walked. We talked of ultimate things, of beginnings and ends, of whence and whither, of why and how. He was then already reconciled to the Church, a practising Catholic, and in company odiously dogmatizing, making a point of gargling the 'a's' as, in imitation of his English co-religionist converts, he pronounced the word 'ca-a-a-tholic'. His arguments could be so silly, that on one occasion I cried out: 'Carlo, I respect your beliefs, I do not quarrel with them, but I cannot swallow your second-rate arguments'. 'There are no others', was his reply.

To his conversion, and to his consent to reasons that he himself knew to be feeble I shall return presently. Meanwhile let me go back to the evening stroll down the slopes of the Sibilla. We gossiped about the universe, we thrilled with cosmic emotion, we discussed revealed religions and their relation to mysticism, we deplored the inevitable necessity of institutions, churches and

governments, we touched upon the burning questions of the day, and never disagreed, not even in opinion.

Carlo could be like that when he liked, and often he was when we were alone together, as I have said again and again. What made him so different in company was not merely the insistence on having the last word or the irresistible impulse to show off, but the fact, so foreign to Anglo-Saxons, that, like most Latins, Placci made a clear division between his private and his public self. No bridge, not even the Mazdian or Mohammedan sharp as a knife's edge leading from earth to heaven, traversed the abyss. What an Italian thinks remains his own treasure hidden away in a safe, to the unlocking of which he alone guards the elaborate secret.

Intimate as we were, Carlo seldom gave one a peep into the depth of his private thinking; often enough however to make me suspect that, to the end, he was incapable of a wholehearted conviction about anything whatever. At bottom he was an integral unbeliever for whom existed neither deity, nor principle, nor quality, nor value, a nihilist in short. And I also suspect that to the end he was haunted by a tormenting doubt, *le pari de Pascal* — 'what if there is a hell?' — that had no little influence on his conduct.



When I first knew him he was like most advanced young Italians in the early eighteen-nineties, like most young writers of those hopeful days: a declared atheist, a positivist, a fervent socialist, and all else that then was most up to date. That none of those professions was more than skin deep was manifested by the rapidity and the completeness with which he turned away without saying 'good-bye-to-all-that', and by the ardour and fanaticism of a person who cannot get himself to believe in anything, that he displayed in burning what he had been imagining he adored.

The changeover was so sudden that we did not perceive it, or as much as suspect it. We had just moved down from Fiesole to San Gervasio; he had been spending the day with us in the late spring, and we kept him company to the tram which was to take him back to Florence. I cannot recall what brought up the subject of divorce, but he startled us by pronouncing himself against it.

Now the English-speaking reader, if Protestant, will not find it easy to believe to what a degree the question of divorce and

remarriage became the storm-centre around which 'ignorant armies' of practising and non-practising Catholics 'clashed by night'. A divorced woman encountered nothing but resentment and disavowal, and if she remarried, she was boycotted. It went so far that Paul Bourget wrote a novel to manifest his admiration for wives who murdered their husbands rather than to live in mortal sin as divorcees who had married again. My wife, a red-hot feminist for whom divorce was identified with the emancipation from the oppression, exploitation, and exasperation of women by the odious but zoologically indispensable males, my wife *pricked up her ears* and asked what he meant, and whether by chance he had returned to the Faith. He answered with fervour that he had. We discovered soon that this conversion, always prayed for, as he knew, by his genuinely and deeply religious mother, had been brought about by the same Mme. de Montebello who later made an Anti-Dreyfusard of him. He turned as violently, as vehemently, as aggressively reactionary, as he had been Leftist only a few weeks before; and ended in time by boasting of being a *forcaiolo*, that is to say, one who would make liberal, even extravagant use of the gallows, and favoured every cause backed by force, fraud and violence. I recall a quarrel over the conduct of his government which gave its approval to Austria, when, backed by Germany, Aehrenthal annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina and refused to receive it, as Grey proposed, from the Concert of Europe, thus making the first breach in those ramparts of legality which for nearly a century had kept Europe safe from a major and general war.

This swift and sure turnover from the extreme of Leftism to the opposite extreme was made easy in Placci's own eye by a book, just published, that I had in all innocence lent him—William James's *The Will to Believe*. It gave him the pragmatistical justification for choosing the principles which his whim of the moment and his tropisms led him to prefer. Like the Scot who, when politely told that he was eating asparagus from the wrong end, retorted 'I prefer-r-r it', Placci would bang down the lid on every discussion by rejoicing in the iniquity of despising reason and glorying in the right James had extended to him to believe what he *willed*.

I daresay Carlo Placci reserved his aggressiveness, his *Recht-haberei*, the need for having the last word, for his more intimate

friends. Once in a while I overheard him with ambassadors—his gods—and I was amused to discover how soft-spoken he was with them; but at the same time I was struck with admiration for the tactfully flattering way in which he drew them out.

I have often heard him accused of being a snob, by which the accuser meant, presumably, that he treated people according to their position in society, whether owing to rank, office, or fame. He did enjoy approaching people of whatever kind of eminence. I must add, however, it was more for individual distinction than for claims of group, class or heredity. He delighted in what used to be called high society for its brilliance, its quicker pulse, its life-enhancing elegance. He was not displeased that in all capitals he received several invitations for every meal. By the time I knew him, society everywhere opened its doors wide to him on every occasion, and he did not need to work for his admission. I cannot say that I have encountered any one with gregarious habits and social qualities who would have acted otherwise, and like a desert hermit refused the appeal of good company.

If to be a snob means, above all, to throw over one's own standards, one's own values, one's own beliefs for those of the Barbarians, no matter how gorgeous, then Placci surely was not a snob. On the contrary. For instance, when he first met me, and sought me out, and introduced me to all his friends and, I might almost add, forced me upon them, including the most exalted, I was quite unknown, from nowhere, with no guarantees, and presented by a lady who was still under the impression, because I had lent her a book on the subject, that I was specializing in pre-Mohammedan Arab poetry. Likewise with Salvemini, who came to Florence fresh from one of those villages of Apulia which count fifty or sixty or seventy thousand peasants huddled together because it had not been safe to remain out for fear of the Barbaresques; those same pirates who infested the Mediterranean until little more than a hundred years ago when the American navy followed by the English and French put an end to their manhunts. This unkempt lad with his huge square head, broad shoulders and provincial accent, was destined to become the idol of all that was most cultured in Florentine society, as well as of his pupils in the university, to become one of the historians of the day and prophet and defender of every good cause; and it was Placci who discovered him on arrival and passed him on to the rest of us.



And so it was with the martyred Amendola, but also with Papini, Soffici, Prezzolini and other equally rubber-necked exploiters of every occasion. Not only young writers, but musicians, painters, sculptors, he would catch them on their first flight and bring them home for us to sample. Though they did not always turn out the geniuses he expected them to be, yet it happened often enough to make it worth while. Nor did he, unlike others in similar positions, Primoli for instance, demand from them any return or regard them as clients who owed allegiance and gratitude for his patronage.

I have mentioned musicians, and it was with them that in earlier years his relations were the most active, for he was himself a highly trained connoisseur of everything musical, a tolerable pianist, and, as many singers and fiddlers used to tell me, an ideal accompanist. The sympathy, the almost uncanny way he could, when he wanted to, get under the skin of others, made him feel the tact and the tempo of the performer exactly as they themselves did. There used to be a great deal of music in his house. His teacher Buonamici played four-handed with him once a week, and Buonamici had studied with Liszt and with Bülow. No musician stopped over in Florence, even the most celebrated, without being seen, and most likely heard, at Placci's. And with them he seemed at his most genial, most appreciative, at his best. He was generosity itself in praising the talents of others.

I have already spoken of how welcome Placci was in Paris, in London, in Munich and Vienna, as well as in Rome. Hans von Bülow dubbed him the 'cosmopolisson', and he remained proud of the nickname long after he had rejected cosmopolitanism, to belch anathemas at all who were not furious nationalists, and partidiots, as I called those who would be cannibals for their own dungheap.

Carlo used often to travel with us. The first long journey I can recall taking together was in 1899, to Budapest for the millennial celebration of the crown of St. Stephen, I believe. There we encountered people from the world over, and colleagues of every branch of study who had gathered for an art congress. We punned, we chaffed, we poked fun, we drank or rather sipped sticky, sickishly over-sweet but famous Tokayer, we even discussed; but one thing we did not do. We did not attend the meetings—not once.

From Budapest we took train to Fiume, then still as unaware

of being Italian, as Italians were unaware of its existence. By boat we wandered in the company of a much-travelled M.P., Philip Stanhope, and great admirer of Austrian rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to Spalato, and from Spalato we crossed over to Ancona. Ancona was at the periphery of a region I had made my own years earlier, in connection with the Venetian Lorenzo Lotto on whom I was preparing a monograph. Crivelli, too, whom I then enjoyed inordinately, left traces there. Carlo was happy to be shown the best of everything, enjoyed the works of art he was seeing under authority, and delighted with the prospect of talking about them. At last we got to Perugia, a day in early October. We had been sightseeing, and Carlo was in raptures. We were having tea, not literally, for tea was not being served in Italy outside the few hotels frequented by the English. He, no doubt, had ordered chocolate and the richest, creamiest cakes in the place, and sopped up the one with the other, enjoying it all the more as he knew that it annoyed me, for he loved to tease. Having consumed a dozen of these cakes he rose from the table, shook hands merrily, and told us he had had all the Berenson he could stand, and was taking the train to Florence.

Neither he nor I owned a car for quite a while after motoring came in, but his French nephew, Lucien Henraux, did. For several years this sensitive, this quick and gifted youth destined, alas, to a premature end, came spring and autumn, to take us to various parts of Italy, Piedmont, the Friuli, the Abruzzi, Calabria, Sicily. I used to make out the itinerary of the journey, but often it was thwarted by Carlo's sudden recollection that we should be passing the dwelling of an acquaintance and must stop to lunch or tea, no matter how boring they might be or how little they could care to have us. Or he would become aware that it was a Sunday, a holiday, and that he must attend Mass. A Low Mass, no! It must be a High Mass because that would give him the satisfaction of procuring the greatest inconvenience to the greatest number—a pleasure inbred in Latins by all their governments, no matter whether black or white, red or blue. Carlo did love to tease, and he sometimes went on till it turned from rather a malicious joke to a more and more exasperating nuisance. He would insist on halting the overcrowded open car with a bump at the crossroads of a Calabrian village—a stinging sun pricking like a swarm of angry bees, and our own dust choking us—stop to question and

cross-question the crowd in an imitation of their own dialect, about the roads and their direction and condition, and about anything else that could prolong what to the rest of us was real distress. The more exhausted he got, the worse grew his teasing, the more sneeringly aggressive; and more than once it ended in a row which came close to breaking up the party.

When we reached our destination after a long day of sitting three abreast in the smallish, far from luxurious, vehicle, exhausted by the sightseeing, by the open air, by the driving, badly fed at that, he would insist, rain or dry, on dragging himself along through crowded streets and cobbled alleys before joining us for the evening meal. In calm moments he would apologize winningly for his naughtiness, and I would answer that his, like an infant's, naughtiness was the result of exhaustion and that he ought to avoid getting over-tired. It was no use, for on the whole he enjoyed annoying and exasperating those he loved best.

A never-failing topic for teasing were my, rather than my wife's, English ways, all the absurder, as while she is the purest of Anglo-Saxons I have not one drop of that precious blood in my veins. He pretended to be annoyed by the inseparable tea-basket, by my giving thought to food, by my paying attention to no news that did not come out of the *London Times*. In short, he would call me the 'Dean of Durham'. I grin, calling up the image of the present wearer of that title.

I remember two experiences among many others. We had left Benevento on a damp, chilly, late April morning, Carlo having insisted that we should take no lunch with us, for we would surely find all we needed somewhere on the way. At Lacedonia, the only possible place, there was no inn, no eating-house, nothing. With difficulty we picked up stale bread and onions. Another spring we were motoring from Potenza to Taranto, and again Carlo would not let us bring food along. We were to stop at Miglionico to see a polyptych by Cima da Conegliano. Where such an important masterpiece had been preserved through the centuries there was sure to be sugar and spice and all that was good to eat. We got to Miglionico, looked at the Cima, and long looking left us hungry. A gendarme whom we consulted about a restaurant humped his shoulders towards an open door. A staircase led upstairs to a large room, whitewashed. A queer odour of phenic acid prevailed, and looking around we discovered bunks

with sick people in them. This hall was both hospital and restaurant. I cleared out and the others followed. We foraged for food. All we could get was a loaf of fresh-baked bread. It tasted delicious. We were hungry. It was sunny. We had seen a fine work of art. Above all, Carlo was drollery personified, describing our discomfort.

While on the subject of our early motoring days, let me add that Placci could be as full of fun as of spleen, and oftener. I recall our litanies in dog Latin, *Sancta Cachuchia ora pro rotis*, and others unquotable. To wile away the time waiting for endless roadside repairs, he invented a Monsieur Dupont, an average French *bourgeois* with his family, and made us talk in character. We did it too well, with some danger of forgetting how to talk in any other way.

He paid up for everything by being delightful as a companion in churches, museums, before landscapes, vibrating, stimulating, responsive, for he was, as I have said before, both sensitive and intelligent, and withal he had the required preparation. And I dare repeat that he enjoyed it the more for enjoying it with me, whom he regarded as supreme arbiter of every phase of beauty that reached one through the eyes. He felt he could rely on my guidance, and if in the course of my studies, which he followed with lively interest, we had to see artifacts that were mediocre as works of art, he relished the satisfaction of being 'in it'.

A singular trait must not pass unrecorded. In the fifty years of intimacy, seeing each other so often, I never heard him talk of the subject uppermost in high society, the question of *qui est avec qui*—with what Mabel is Edward now? I cannot recall his gossiping about any particular woman. As far as I knew, sex did not seem to interest him in others or in himself. Only once did he speak of his own experience. Some thirty-five years ago we were crossing the Bernina on a sparkling late September day, and as we were crunching the hard, dazzling snow, he talked of the expedients he had to take to, in order to keep his various loves from interfering with each other. He referred to it as to 'old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago'. If he had love affairs during the half-century that I knew him, I never heard of them, although I did see him flirt rather ostentatiously with this or that ripe beauty. As for Mme. de Montebello, he was Dante to her Beatrice. Nor did he take interest in my affairs of the heart. I recall suffering so much



from *peine d'amour* that I could not help appealing for sympathy. He pooh-poohed me, and was almost as stoney as was Edith Wharton on a similar occasion.

I have been speaking of Placci so long, and as yet have said nothing of his physical appearance. To foreigners he looked like Savonarola. My eye saw more resemblance to the portraits in the pre-Inca Peruvian potteries. Indeed, he had about him something Aztec, Maya, Cherokee, in short, Central American. He had the enormous chest of a Stone Age man, not short, nor thick. Standing, his natural position was as frontal as an early dynasty Egyptian's, with the palm of his hands flat, turned outward, and held close to his thighs. His face was unusually frontal, and after seventy looked more and more like a Mexican or Aztec mask. He kept his hair thick to the end, and it never got more than iron grey. His eyes were dark. The lower lip tended to protrude, especially when he was cross. He dressed neatly but with no elegance, and always conventionally.

Placci was not only a dilettante in music, and a tolerable pianist, as already recounted, but a man of letters. In earlier years he wrote one or two novels which his acquaintances read; and later, till the other day in fact, he contributed several articles a year to the *Corriere della Sera*. They were nearly always reminiscent or societyish, but did no justice to what in favourable moments he could say in conversation. Curiously enough, while he could tell a very good story, even when not merely droll, and discuss character penetratingly, his pen remained far behind his tongue, and even his tongue could not make his ordinary doings interesting. His letters were seldom more than lists of people he had seen; and we got to dread our first meeting after a separation. He would insist on naming one person after the other he had seen, of whom so few had for us any interest.

He began to decline some ten years ago, falling asleep after meals, wherever he happened to be. He still went to Paris and London and Rome every year, and people remained kind and hospitable; but he had less and less to contribute. He confessed that he could not read any more, that he did not care any more for travel, and little for music. Nothing remained for him but 'people, people, people', as he told me his reminiscences were to be entitled, if the diary he kept for years should be published. Less than ever could he bear to be alone. He used to boast of turning

the Italian proverb 'better alone than in poor company' into 'any company rather than alone'. When travelling he would look out for the most crowded carriage, as the rest of us did for the emptiest. Sad that during his last illness he would not, or could not, bear to see anyone.

This is what I have to say at present about dear Carlo Placci, as I saw him, put up with him, loved him, and to a limited extent knew him. I wonder what people who have not known him will get out of what I have just written. A consistent impression, no matter how little like the Platonic Idea, the metaphysical portrait? In North Africa the natives attach bits of rags, wool, linen, cotton of any and every colour, to the scraggy bushes planted around the tombs of their marabouts or santons. Perhaps that is all I have contributed to the memory of Carlo Placci. Not an effigy in mosaic.

*I. Tatti, Settignano, 24 January 1941.*

*E. L. T. MESENS*

## 'SCOTTIE' WILSON

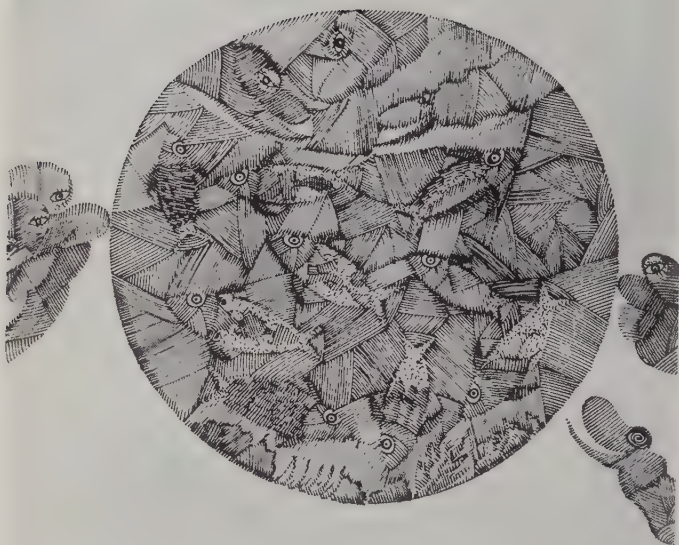
A MAN who has refused to be a slave of our chain-civilization; a very simple man, indeed, and who has achieved his own liberation. Not with the light of the spirit nor with a clever interpretation of materialism, but with the discovery, for himself and through his own means, of drawing.

'Scottie' Wilson was born in 1890, in one of the poorer parts of Glasgow. He was one of the many children of a hard working-class family, and as soon as 'Scottie' was in his early 'teens he had to get busy to bring money into the home. This state of affairs would have had no end if he had not rebelled in time.

I met him about nine months ago, and it is with the greatest difficulties since then that I have been able to lift here and there a piece of the curtain that hides his previous life. Not because he is shy, but rather because of a natural discretion that makes a part of his charm and makes his work the more intriguing. He is not the type of adventurer who boasts about the tougher aspects of his life for the benefit of an occasional audience. Far from it. It has



Original free-hand Pen Drawings by 'SCOTTIE' WILSON  
(Collection J. B. Brunius)



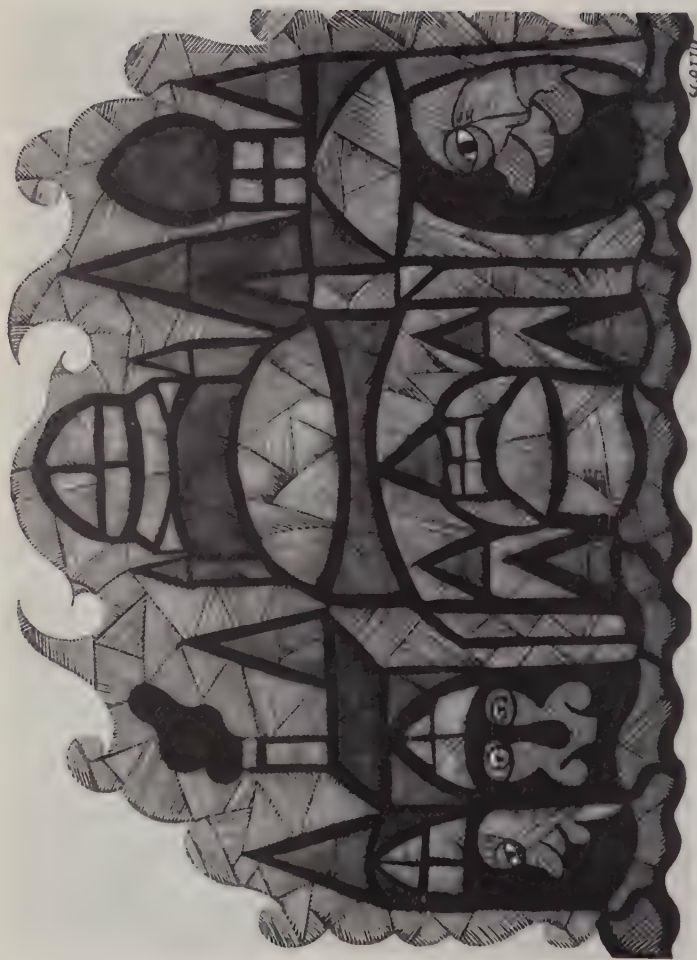
COTTIE

(Collection E. L. T. Mesens)





(Courtesy London Gallery Ltd.)



taken me the greatest patience (and a fair number of pints of bitter) to collect a few facts about himself. I am going to give them away without bombast, and with the certainty not to hurt 'Scottie' in the slightest degree. Apparently, he ran away from home at the age of sixteen and went to volunteer for the army at Aldershot. From there he was sent to a garrison in Bloemfontein (South Africa). How he got out of it, and what happened afterwards, I do not know, but about fifteen years ago, after having returned to his native Scotland, he decided one day to go to Canada. Here again he told me that he opened a second-hand furniture shop at Toronto. It was not a success, and the little money he had got to set it up soon vanished. Not too much troubled by his commercial setback, 'Scottie' retired more and more frequently into his back shop, where he passed long hours in covering a large piece of beaverboard on his work-table top with tiny pen strokes. Since his childhood he had been haunted by strange dreams, and now he suddenly found himself able to give them plastic form, finding in this activity the greatest satisfaction and gratification for himself. Unhappiness, want, and petty miseries, ceased suddenly to have any importance for him. The second-hand furniture business was soon wound up. He found one day on his path a charming and refined man, a *de luxe* bookbinder and decorator, called Mr. Douglas Duncan, who fell for 'Scottie's' work, bought it and supported him. Since then 'Scottie' has never stopped drawing.

The early works, as far as I can make out—for 'Scottie' has very little sense of data—have very much the aspect of doodlings. But doodlings with a central theme: himself. The pen strokes have about the quality of a schoolboy's writing. (This reminds me of the advertisement, true for once, which says: *THE HAND THAT CAN WRITE CAN ALSO DRAW*. In this case, and elsewhere, I should even be inclined to add: *'The hand that cannot write can draw nevertheless'*.) The colouring of these early drawings—already at this time he used the crayon—is not very convincing, but altogether they are remarkable documents. After that, something must have happened in 'Scottie's' life, because the drawings which follow become suddenly very firm, masterly in writing, and very rich and distinguished in colour. I have tried to find out if he has ever had any friendly relations with artists, and the only story I collected which seems to me of any relevance is the

following: He met in Toronto a man he called 'the Professor', who tried to play the violin. This man was dirty and badly groomed, and very unhappy with his 'missus'. When 'the Professor' started to play his fiddle the wife shouted and locked him up in the cellar. And there the violinist could apparently only obtain from his instrument the most horrible cat-calls—except when 'Scottie' accepted to go into the cellar with him and conduct (!) his playing. Then, apparently, they had great moments of 'artistic exaltation'. Another story is also interesting: One day 'Scottie' got fed up with the sight of Toronto. He collected all the money he could and made a journey to Winnipeg, where he remained for a certain time. He must have seen some Indian totems because the totemic spirit is present in many of his works. Strangely enough, when I asked him if he remembered any American Indian art he did not, and found no comment to make on them. Perhaps he has absorbed them with the internal eye. In walking the streets of Hampstead and Mayfair with 'Scottie' I have noticed that his faculty of attention for what is going on is seldom awakened. I have put him in front of paintings by artists as diverse as Miró, Picasso, Chirico—even purposely in front of two beautiful Paul Klees—and his comment was a polite 'very nice'. The sole painting that thrilled him, one day, was a Magritte in which there is a musical instrument in brass bursting into flame. That he found wonderful, probably because he had never dreamed of such a happening.

Nevertheless, 'Scottie's' drawings are made with a very remarkable self-invented technique. I have never seen anything resembling these thousands of little strokes patiently aligned; anything resembling this prismatic play of hatching, giving light or volume. The coloured crayons are sometimes applied under the pen strokes, sometimes over them, and constitute eloquent, rich and refined blends. The magic of simplicity.

'Scottie' Wilson does not ask very much from the world. His constant ambition is to show his work with himself drawing in front of the public. He has been 'on show' some time ago in Aberdeen, and apparently is now 'doing another show' in Scarborough. He would like to settle down, he says, with a nice, well-mannered lady who would play the piano, the violin, the harp, or *even* the organ.

'Scottie' Wilson's work, as he says himself, '*is a life's dream*'.



# ALDOUS HUXLEY

## RELIGION AND TEMPERAMENT<sup>1</sup>

WHAT precisely is the relation between individual constitution and temperament on the one hand and the kind and degree of spiritual knowledge on the other? The materials for a comprehensively accurate answer to this question are not available—except, perhaps, in the form of that incommunicable science, based upon intuition and long practice, that exists in the minds of experienced ‘spiritual directors’. But the answer that *can* be given, though incomplete, is highly significant.

All knowledge, as we have seen, is a function of being. Or, to phrase the same idea in scholastic terms, the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. In the *Introduction* reference was made to the effect upon knowledge of changes of being along what may be called its vertical axis, in the direction of sanctity or its opposite. But there is also variation in the horizontal plane. Congenitally by psycho-physical constitution, each one of us is born into a certain position on this horizontal plane. It is a vast territory, still imperfectly explored, a continent stretching all the way from imbecility to genius, from shrinking weakness to aggressive strength, from cruelty to Pickwickian kindliness, from self-revealing sociability to taciturn misanthropy and love of solitude, from an almost frantic lasciviousness to an almost untempted continence. From any point on this huge expanse of possible human nature an individual can move almost indefinitely up or down, towards union with the divine Ground of his own and all other beings, or towards the last, the infernal extremes of separateness and selfhood. But where horizontal movement is concerned there is far less freedom. It is impossible for one kind of physical constitution to transform itself into another kind; and the particular temperament associated with a given physical

<sup>1</sup> This extract is included by permission of Mr. Aldous Huxley and of Messrs. Chatto and Windus, who will shortly be publishing *The Perennial Philosophy* in this country.

constitution can be modified only within narrow limits. With the best will in the world and the best social environment, all that anyone can hope to do is to make the best of his congenital psycho-physical make-up; to change the fundamental patterns of constitution and temperament is beyond his power.

In the course of the last thirty centuries many attempts have been made to work out a classification system in terms of which human differences could be measured and described. For example, there is the ancient Hindu method of classifying people according to the psycho-physico-social categories of caste. There are the primarily medical classifications associated with the name of Hippocrates, classifications in terms of two main 'habits'—the phthisic and the apoplectic—or of the four humours (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile) and the four qualities (hot, cold, moist and dry). More recently there have been the various physiognomic systems of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the crude and merely psychological dichotomy of introversion and extraversion; the more complete, but still inadequate, psycho-physical classifications proposed by Kretschmer, Stockard, Viola and others; and finally the system, more comprehensive, more flexibly adequate to the complex facts than all those which preceded it, worked out by Dr. William Sheldon and his collaborators.

In the present section our concern is with classifications of human differences in relation to the problems of the spiritual life. Traditional systems will be described and illustrated, and the findings of the Perennial Philosophy will be compared with the conclusions reached by the most recent scientific research.

In the West, the traditional Catholic classification of human beings is based upon the Gospel anecdote of Martha and Mary. The way of Martha is the way of salvation through action, the way of Mary is the way through contemplation. Following Aristotle, who in this as in many other matters was in accord with the Perennial Philosophy, Catholic thinkers have regarded contemplation (the highest term of which is the unitive knowledge of the Godhead) as man's final end, and therefore have always held that Mary's was indeed the better way.

Significantly enough, it is in essentially similar terms that Dr. Radin classifies and (by implication) evaluates primitive human beings in so far as they are philosophers and religious devotees.

For him there is no doubt that the higher monotheistic forms of primitive religion are created (or should one rather say, with Plato, *discovered?*) by people belonging to the first of the two great psycho-physical classes of human beings—the men of thought. To those belonging to the other class, the men of action, is due the creation or discovery of the lower, unphilosophical, polytheistic kinds of religion.

This simple dichotomy is a classification of human differences that is valid so far as it goes. But like all such dichotomies, whether physical (like Hippocrates' division of humanity into those of phthisic and those of apoplectic habit) or psychological (like Jung's classification in terms of introvert and extravert), this grouping of the religious into those who think and those who act, those who follow the way of Martha and those who follow the way of Mary, is inadequate to the facts. And of course no director of souls, no head of a religious organization, is ever, in actual practice, content with this all too simple system. Underlying the best Catholic writing on prayer and the best Catholic practice in the matter of recognizing vocations and assigning duties, we sense the existence of an implicit and unformulated classification of human differences more complete and more realistic than the explicit dichotomy of action and contemplation.

In Hindu thought the outlines of this completer and more adequate classification are clearly indicated. The ways leading to the delivering union with God are not two, but three—the way of works, the way of knowledge, and the way of devotion. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna in all three paths—liberation through action without attachment; liberation through knowledge of the Self and the Absolute Ground of all being with which it is identical; and liberation through intense devotion to the personal God or the divine incarnation.

Do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme Goal verily. By action alone men like Janaka attained perfection.

But there is also the way of Mary.

Freed from passion, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and purified by the fires of Knowledge, many have become one with my Being.

And again:

Those who have completely controlled their senses and are of even mind under all conditions and thus contemplate the Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the Omnipresent, the Incomprehensible, the Eternal—they, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone and none else.

But the path of contemplation is not easy.

The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest is the more difficult; for, to those who are in the body, the realization of the Unmanifest is hard. But those who consecrate all their actions to Me (as the personal God, or as the divine Incarnation), who regard Me as the supreme Goal, who worship Me and meditate upon Me with singleminded concentration—for those whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, I become ere long the Saviour from the world's ocean of mortality.

These three ways of deliverance are precisely correlated with the three categories, in terms of which Sheldon has worked out what is, without question, the best and most adequate classification of human differences. Human beings, he has shown, vary continuously between the viable extremes of a tri-polar system; and physical and psychological measurements can be devised, whereby any given individual may be accurately located in relation to the three co-ordinates. Or we can put the matter differently and say that any given individual is a mixture, in varying proportions, of three physical and three closely related psychological components. The strength of each component can be measured according to empirically determined procedures. To the three physical components Sheldon gives the names of endomorphy, mesomorphy and ectomorphy. The individual with a high degree of endomorphy is predominantly soft and rounded and may easily become grossly fat. The high mesomorph is hard, big-boned and strong-muscled. The high ectomorph is slender and has small bones and stringy, weak, unemphatic muscles. The endomorph has a huge gut, a gut that may be more than twice as heavy and twice as long as that of the extreme ectomorph. In a real sense his or her body is built around the digestive tract. The centrally significant fact of mesomorphic physique, on the other hand, is the powerful musculature, while that of the ectomorph is the



over-sensitive and (since the ratio of body surface to mass is higher in ectomorphs than in either of the other types) relatively unprotected nervous system.

With endomorphic constitution is closely correlated a temperamental pattern, which Sheldon calls viscerotonia. Significant among the viscerotonic traits are love of food and, characteristically, love of eating in common; love of comfort and luxury; love of ceremoniousness; indiscriminate amiability and love of people as such; fear of solitude and craving for company; uninhibited expression of emotion; love of childhood, in the form of nostalgia towards one's own past and in an intense enjoyment of family life; craving for affection and social support, and need of people when in trouble. The temperament that is related to mesomorphy is called somatotonia. In this the dominating traits are love of muscular activity, aggressiveness and lust for power; indifference to pain; callousness in regard to other people's feelings; a love of combat and competitiveness; a high degree of physical courage; a nostalgic feeling, not for childhood, but for youth, the period of maximum muscular power; a need for activity when in trouble.

From the foregoing descriptions it will be seen how inadequate is the Jungian conception of extraversion, as a simple antithesis to introversion. Extraversion is not simple; it is of two radically different kinds. There is the emotional, sociable extraversion of the viscerotonic endomorph—the person who is always seeking company and telling everybody just what he feels. And there is the extraversion of the big-muscled somatotonic—the person who looks outward on the world as a place where he can exercise power, where he can bend people to his will and shape things to his heart's desire. One is the genial extraversion of the salesman, the Rotarian good mixer, the liberal Protestant clergyman. The other is the extraversion of the engineer who works off his lust for power on things, of the sportsman and the professional blood-and-iron soldier, of the ambitious business executive and politician, of the dictator, whether in the home or at the head of a State.

With cerebrotonia, the temperament that is correlated with ectomorphic physique, we leave the genial world of Pickwick, the strenuously competitive world of Hotspur, and pass into an entirely different and somewhat disquieting kind of universe—that of Hamlet and Ivan Karamazov. The extreme cerebrotonic is the over-alert, over-sensitive introvert, who is more concerned

with what goes on behind his eyes—with the constructions of thought and imagination—with the variations of feeling and consciousness—than with that external world, to which, in their different ways, the viscerotonic and the somatotonic pay their primary attention and allegiance. Cerebrotonics have little or no desire to dominate, nor do they feel the viscerotonic's indiscriminate liking for people as people; on the contrary they want to live and let live, and their passion for privacy is intense. Solitary confinement, the most terrible punishment that can be inflicted on the soft, round, genial person, is, for the cerebrotonic, no punishment at all. For him the ultimate horror is the boarding school and the barracks. In company cerebrotonics are nervous and shy, tensely inhibited and unpredictably moody. (It is a significant fact that no extreme cerebrotonic has ever been a good actor or actress.) Cerebrotonics hate to slam doors or raise their voices, and suffer acutely from the unrestrained bellowing and trampling of the somatotonic. Their manner is restrained, and when it comes to expressing their feelings they are extremely reserved. The emotional gush of the viscerotonic strikes them as offensively shallow and even insincere, nor have they any patience with viscerotonic ceremoniousness and love of luxury and magnificence. They do not easily form habits and find it hard to adapt their lives to the routines which come so naturally to somatotonics. Owing to their over-sensitiveness, cerebrotonics are often extremely, almost insanely sexual; but they are hardly ever tempted to take to drink—for alcohol, which heightens the natural aggressiveness of the somatotonic and increases the relaxed amiability of the viscerotonic, merely makes them feel ill and depressed. Each in his own way, the viscerotonic and the somatotonic are well adapted to the world they live in; but the introverted cerebrotonic is in some sort incommensurable with the things and people and institutions that surround him. Consequently a remarkably high proportion of extreme cerebrotonics fail to make good as normal citizens and average pillars of society. But if many fail, many also become abnormal on the higher side of the average. In universities, monasteries and research laboratories—wherever sheltered conditions are provided for those whose small guts and feeble muscles do not permit them to eat or fight their way through the ordinary rough and tumble—the percentage of outstandingly gifted and accomplished

cerebrotonics will almost always be very high. Realizing the importance of this extreme, over-evolved and scarcely viable type of human being, all civilizations have provided in one way or another for its protection.

In the light of these descriptions we can understand more clearly the Bhagavad Gita's classification of paths to salvation. The path of devotion is the path naturally followed by the person in whom the viscerotonic component is high. His inborn tendency to externalize the emotions he spontaneously feels in regard to persons can be disciplined and canalized, so that a merely animal gregariousness and a merely human kindness become transformed into charity—devotion to the personal God and universal good will and compassion towards all sentient beings.

The path of works is for those whose extraversion is of the somatotonic kind, those who in all circumstances feel the need to 'do something'. In the unregenerate somatotonic this craving for action is always associated with aggressiveness, self-assertion and the lust for power. For the born *Kshatriya*, or warrior-ruler, the task, as Krishna explains to Arjuna, is to get rid of those fatal accompaniments to the love of action and to work without regard to the fruits of work, in a state of complete non-attachment to self. Which is, of course, like everything else, a good deal easier said than done.

Finally, there is the way of knowledge, through the modification of consciousness, until it ceases to be ego-centred and becomes centred in and united with the divine Ground. This is the way to which the extreme cerebrotonic is naturally drawn. His special discipline consists in the mortification of his innate tendency towards introversion for its own sake, towards thought and imagination and self-analysis as ends in themselves rather than as means towards the ultimate transcendence of fantasy and discursive reasoning in the timeless act of pure intellectual intuition.

Within the general population, as we have seen, variation is continuous, and in most people the three components are fairly evenly mixed. Those exhibiting extreme predominance of any one component are relatively rare. And yet, in spite of their rarity, it is by the thought-patterns characteristic of these extreme individuals that theology and ethics, at any rate on the theoretical side, have been mainly dominated. The reason for this is simple.

Any extreme position is more uncompromisingly clear and therefore more easily recognized and understood than the intermediate positions, which are the natural thought-pattern of the person in whom the constituent components of personality are evenly balanced. These intermediate positions, it should be noted, do not in any sense contain or reconcile the extreme positions; they are merely other thought-patterns added to the list of possible systems. The construction of an all-embracing system of metaphysics, ethics and psychology is a task that can never be accomplished by any single individual, for the sufficient reason that he is an individual with one particular kind of constitution and temperament and therefore capable of knowing only according to the mode of his own being. Hence the advantages inherent in what may be called the anthological approach to truth.

The Sanskrit *dharma*—one of the key words in Indian formulations of the Perennial Philosophy—has two principal meanings. The *dharma* of an individual is, first of all, his essential nature, the intrinsic law of his being and development. But *dharma* also signifies the law of righteousness and piety. The implications of this double meaning are clear: a man's duty, how he ought to live, what he ought to believe and what he ought to do about his beliefs—these things are conditioned by his essential nature, his constitution and temperament. Going a good deal further than do the Catholics, with their doctrine of vocations, the Indians admit the right of individuals with different *dharma*s to worship different aspects or conceptions of the divine. Hence the almost total absence, among Hindus and Buddhists, of bloody persecutions, religious wars and proselytizing imperialism.

It should, however, be remarked that, within its own ecclesiastical fold, Catholicism has been almost as tolerant as Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. Nominally one, each of these religions consists, in fact, of a number of very different religions, covering the whole gamut of thought and behaviour from fetishism, through polytheism, through legalistic monotheism, through devotion to the sacred humanity of the Avatar, to the profession of the Perennial Philosophy and the practice of a purely spiritual religion that seeks the unitive knowledge of the Absolute Godhead. These tolerated religions-within-a-religion are not, of course, regarded as equally valuable or equally true. To worship polytheistically may be one's *dharma*; nevertheless the fact remains



that man's final end is the unitive knowledge of the Godhead, and all the historical formulations of the Perennial Philosophy are agreed that every human being ought, and perhaps in some way or other actually will, achieve that end. 'All souls', writes Father Garrigou-Lagrange, 'receive a general remote call to the mystical life; and if all were faithful in avoiding, as they should, not merely mortal but venial sin, if they were, each according to his condition, docile to the Holy Ghost, and if they lived long enough, a day would come when they would receive the proximate and efficacious vocation to a high perfection and to the mystical life properly so called.' With this statement Hindu and Buddhist theologians would probably agree; but they would add that every soul will in fact eventually attain this 'high perfection'. All are called, but in any given generation few are chosen, because few choose themselves. But the series of conscious existences, corporeal or incorporeal, is indefinitely long; there is therefore time and opportunity for everyone to learn the necessary lessons. Moreover, there will always be helpers. For periodically there are 'descents' of the Godhead into physical form; and at all times there are future Buddhas ready, on the threshold of reunion with the Intelligible Light, to renounce the bliss of immediate liberation in order to return as saviours and teachers again and again into the world of suffering and time and evil, until at last every sentient being shall have been delivered into eternity.

The practical consequences of this doctrine are clear enough. The lower forms of religion, whether emotional, active or intellectual, are never to be accepted as final. True, each of them comes naturally to persons of a certain kind of constitution and temperament; but the *dharma* or duty of any given individual is not to remain complacently fixed in the imperfect religion that happens to suit him; it is rather to transcend it, not by impossibly denying the modes of thought, behaviour and feeling that are natural to him, but by making use of them, so that by means of nature he may pass beyond nature. Thus the introvert uses 'discrimination' (in the Indian phrase), and so learns to distinguish the mental activities of the ego from the principal consciousness of the Self, which is akin to, or identical with, the divine Ground. The emotional extravert learns to 'hate his father and mother' (in other words to give up his selfish attachment to the pleasures of indiscriminately loving and being loved), concentrates his devotion

on the personal or incarnate aspect of God, and comes at last to love the Absolute Godhead by an act, no longer of feeling, but of will illuminated by knowledge. And finally there is that other kind of extravert, whose concern is not with the pleasures of giving or receiving affection, but with the satisfaction of his lust for power over things, events and persons. Using his own nature to transcend his own nature, he must follow the path laid down in the Bhagavad Gita for the bewildered Arjuna—the path of work without attachment to the fruits of work, the path of what St. François de Sales calls ‘holy indifference’, the path that leads through the forgetting of self to the discovery of the Self.

In the course of history it has often happened that one or other of the imperfect religions has been taken too seriously and regarded as good and true in itself, instead of as a means to the ultimate end of all religion. The effects of such mistakes are often disastrous. For example, many Protestant sects have insisted on the necessity, or at least the extreme desirability, of a violent conversion. But violent conversion, as Sheldon has pointed out, is a phenomenon confined almost exclusively to persons with a high degree of somatotonia. These persons are so intensely extraverted as to be quite unaware of what is happening in the lower levels of their minds. If for any reason their attention comes to be turned inwards, the resulting self-knowledge, because of its novelty and strangeness, presents itself with the force and quality of a revelation and their *matanoia*, or change of mind, is sudden and thrilling. This change may be to religion, or it may be to something else—for example, to psycho-analysis. To insist upon the necessity of violent conversion as the only means to salvation is about as sensible as it would be to insist upon the necessity of having a large face, heavy bones and powerful muscles. To those naturally subject to this kind of emotional upheaval, the doctrine that makes salvation dependent on conversion gives a complacency that is quite fatal to spiritual growth, while those who are incapable of it are filled with a no less fatal despair. Other examples of inadequate theologies based upon psychological ignorance could easily be cited. One remembers, for instance, the sad case of Calvin, the cerebrotonic who took his own intellectual constructions so seriously that he lost all sense of reality, both human and spiritual. And then there is our liberal Protestantism, that predominantly viscerotonic heresy, which seems to have

forgotten the very existence of the Father, Spirit and Logos and equates Christianity with an emotional attachment to Christ's humanity or (to use the currently popular phrase) 'the personality of Jesus', worshipped idolatrously as though there were no other God. Even within all-comprehensive Catholicism we constantly hear complaints of the ignorant and self-centred directors, who impose upon the souls under their charge a religious *dharma* wholly unsuited to their nature—with results which writers such as St. John of the Cross describe as wholly pernicious. We see, then, that it is natural for us to think of God as possessed of the qualities which our temperament tends to make us perceive in Him; but unless nature finds a way of transcending itself by means of itself, we are lost. In the last analysis Philo is quite right in saying that those who do not conceive God purely and simply as the One injure, not God of course, but themselves and, along with themselves, their fellows.

The way of knowledge comes most naturally to persons whose temperament is predominantly cerebrotonic. By this I do not mean that the following of this way is easy for the cerebrotonic. His specially besetting sins are just as difficult to overcome as are the sins which beset the power-loving somatotonic and the extreme viscerotonic with his gluttony for food and comfort and social approval. Rather I mean that the idea that such a way exists and can be followed (either by discrimination, or through non-attached work and one-pointed devotion) is one which spontaneously occurs to the cerebrotonic. At all levels of culture he is the natural monotheist; and this natural monotheist, as Dr. Radin's examples of primitive theology clearly show, is often a monotheist of the *tat tvam asi*, inner-light school. Persons committed by their temperament to one or other of the two kinds of extraversion are natural polytheists. But natural polytheists can, without much difficulty, be convinced of the theoretical superiority of monotheism. The nature of human reason is such that there is an intrinsic plausibility about any hypothesis which seeks to explain the manifold in terms of unity, to reduce apparent multiplicity to essential identity. And from this theoretical monotheism the half-converted polytheist can, if he chooses, go on (through practices suitable to his own particular temperament) to the actual realization of the divine Ground of his own and all other beings. He *can*, I repeat, and sometimes he actually does. But very often he

does not. There are many theoretical monotheists whose whole life and every action prove that in reality they are still what their temperament inclines them to be—polytheists, worshippers not of the one God they sometimes talk about, but of the many gods, nationalistic and technological, financial and familial, to whom in practice they pay all their allegiance.

In Christian art the Saviour has almost invariably been represented as slender, small-boned, unemphatically muscled. Large, powerful Christs are a rather shocking exception to a very ancient rule. Of Rubens' crucifixions William Black contemptuously wrote:

I understood Christ was a carpenter  
And not a brewer's servant, my good sir.

In a word, the traditional Jesus is thought of as a man of predominantly ectomorphic physique and therefore, by implication, of predominantly cerebrotonic temperament. The central core of primitive Christian doctrine confirms the essential correctness of the iconographic tradition. The religion of the Gospels is what we should expect from a cerebrotonic—not, of course, from any cerebrotonic, but from one who had used the psycho-physical peculiarities of his own nature to transcend nature, who had followed his particular *dharma* to its spiritual goal. The insistence that the Kingdom of Heaven is within; the ignoring of ritual; the slightly contemptuous attitude towards legalism, towards the ceremonial routines of organized religion, towards hallowed days and places; the general other-worldliness; the emphasis laid upon restraint, not merely of overt action, but even of desire and unexpressed intention; the indifference to the splendours of material civilization and the love of poverty as one of the greatest of goods; the doctrine that non-attachment must be carried even into the sphere of family relationships and that even devotion to the highest goals of merely human ideals, even the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, may be idolatrous distractions from the love of God—all these are characteristically cerebrotonic ideas, such as would never have occurred spontaneously to the extraverted power lover or the equally extraverted viscerotonic.

Primitive Buddhism is no less predominantly cerebrotonic than primitive Christianity, and so is Vedanta, the metaphysical discipline which lies at the heart of Hinduism. Confucianism, on

the contrary, is a mainly viscerotonic system—familial, ceremonious and thoroughly this-worldly. And in Mohammedanism we find a system which incorporates strongly somatotonic elements. Hence Islam's black record of holy wars and persecutions—a record comparable to that of later Christianity, after that religion had so far compromised with unregenerate somatotonia as to call its ecclesiastical organization 'the Church Militant'.

So far as the achievement of man's final end is concerned, it is as much a handicap to be an extreme cerebrotonic or an extreme viscerotonic as it is to be an extreme somatotonic. But whereas the cerebrotonic and the viscerotonic cannot do much harm except to themselves and those in immediate contact with them, the extreme somatotonic, with his native aggressiveness, plays havoc with whole societies. From one point of view civilization may be defined as a complex of religious, legal and educational devices for preventing extreme somatotonics from doing too much mischief, and for directing their irrepressible energies into socially desirable channels. Confucianism and Chinese culture have sought to achieve this end by inculcating filial piety, good manners and an amiably viscerotonic epicureanism—the whole reinforced somewhat incongruously by the cerebrotonic spirituality and restraints of Buddhism and classical Taoism. In India the caste system represents an attempt to subordinate military, political and financial power to spiritual authority; and the education given to all classes still insists so strongly upon the fact that man's final end is unitive knowledge of God that even at the present time, even after nearly two hundred years of gradually accelerating Europeanization, successful somatotonics will, in middle life, give up wealth, position and power to end their days as humble seekers after enlightenment. In Catholic Europe, as in India, there was an effort to subordinate temporal power to spiritual authority; but since the Church itself exercised temporal power through the agency of political prelates and mitred business men, the effort was never more than partially successful. After the Reformation even the pious wish to limit temporal power by means of spiritual authority was completely abandoned. Henry VIII made himself, in Stubbs's words, 'the Pope, the whole Pope, and something more than the Pope', and his example has been followed by most heads of States ever since. Power has been limited only by other



powers, not by an appeal to first principles as interpreted by those who are morally and spiritually qualified to know what they are talking about. Meanwhile, the interest in religion has everywhere declined and even among believing Christians the Perennial Philosophy has been to a great extent replaced by a metaphysic of inevitable progress and an evolving God, by a passionate concern, not with eternity, but with future time. And almost suddenly, within the last quarter of a century, there has been consummated what Sheldon calls a 'somatotonic revolution', directed against all that is characteristically cerebrotonic in the theory and practice of traditional Christian culture. Here are a few symptoms of this somatotonic revolution.

In traditional Christianity, as in all the great religious formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, it was axiomatic that contemplation is the end and purpose of action. Today the great majority even of professed Christians regard action (directed towards material and social progress) as the end, and analytic thought (there is no question any longer of integral thought, or contemplation) as the means to that end.

In traditional Christianity, as in the other formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, the secret of happiness and the way to salvation were to be sought, not in the external environment, but in the individual's state of mind with regard to the environment. Today the all-important thing is not the state of the mind, but the state of the environment. Happiness and moral progress depend, it is thought, on bigger and better gadgets and a higher standard of living.

In traditional Christian education the stress was all on restraint; with the recent rise of the 'progressive school' it is all on activity and 'self-expression'.

Traditionally Christian good manners outlawed all expressions of pleasure in the satisfaction of physical appetites. 'You may love a screeching owl, but you must not love a roasted fowl'—such was the rhyme on which children were brought up in the nurseries of only fifty years ago. Today the young unceasingly proclaim how much they 'love' and 'adore' different kinds of food and drink; adolescents and adults talk about the 'thrills' they derive from the stimulation of their sexuality. The popular philosophy of life has ceased to be based on the classics of devotion and the rules of aristocratic good breeding, and is now moulded by the

writers of advertising copy, whose one idea is to persuade everybody to be as extraverted and uninhibitedly greedy as possible, since of course it is only the possessive, the restless, the distracted, who spend money on the things that advertisers want to sell. Technological progress is in part the product of the somatotonic revolution, in part the producer and sustainer of that revolution. The extraverted attention results in technological discoveries. (Significantly enough, a high degree of material civilization has always been associated with the large-scale and officially sanctioned practice of polytheism.) In their turn, technological discoveries have resulted in mass production; and mass production, it is obvious, cannot be kept going at full blast except by persuading the whole population to accept the somatotonic *Weltanschauung* and act accordingly.

Like technological progress, with which it is so closely associated in so many ways, modern war is at once a cause and a result of the somatotonic revolution. Nazi education, which was specifically education for war, had two principal aims: to encourage the manifestation of somatotonia in those most richly endowed with that component of personality, and to make the rest of the population feel ashamed of its relaxed amiability or its inward-looking sensitiveness and tendency towards self-restraint and tender-mindedness. During the war the enemies of Nazism have been compelled, of course, to borrow from the Nazis' educational philosophy. All over the world millions of young men and even of young women are being systematically educated to be 'tough' and to value 'toughness' beyond every other moral quality. With this system of somatotonic ethics is associated the idolatrous and polytheistic theology of nationalism—a pseudo-religion far stronger at the present time for evil and division than is Christianity, or any other monotheistic religion, for unification and good. In the past most societies tried systematically to discourage somatotonia. This was a measure of self-defence; they did not want to be physically destroyed by the power-loving aggressiveness of their most active minority, and they did not want to be spiritually blinded by an excess of extraversion. During the last few years all this has been changed. What, we may apprehensively wonder, will be the result of the current world-wide reversal of an immemorial social policy? Time alone will show.

HAROLD JENKINS

# WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

## IX—SOUTH AFRICA

Dear John,

If you do decide to come to South Africa, it is to be hoped you will come by sea. To prefer a ship to an aeroplane, the old to the new, will be at once to violate all the prejudices of the country; but that can't be helped. For years after the war air-travel is likely to be expensive enough for an arrival by sea to be comprehensible if undistinguished. And in exchange for your loss of prestige you will have the æsthetic satisfaction of beginning with Cape Town seen from Table Bay (if you are lucky, just before dawn) instead of being dropped down on the bare and featureless highveld on the outskirts of Johannesburg or Pretoria. Johannesburg will be your ultimate destination, but coming from the old world, you will not confuse the ultimate end with the immediate, or speed with comfort. So you will forbear to short-circuit the grand approach which Nature carefully prepared for you.

Cape Town (you will hesitate, I suppose, about whether this is one word or two. Only habit will resolve your confusion: the practice of the inhabitants will not)—Cape Town will be marked out for you in an arc of lights around the bay, and behind them more lights in clots and clusters and irregular spokes reaching high up into the darkness. (You will understand what this meant to many thousands of British troops arriving fresh from years of an English blackout.) But these upward-reaching spokes will not prepare you for the height of Table Mountain, which will reduce them to a tawdry little frill around its base when in the dawn it astonishingly looms a vast solid mass of grey rock, flat-topped like a table standing three thousand feet above the sea. More likely than not a table-cloth of cloud rests lightly on its surface as you watch from the sea and the sun slowly rises on your left. 'On your left'—you think nothing of that at the time, but later your subconscious presents you with it as a conundrum of geography:

poised at the southern tip of Africa, Cape Town actually faces north. And that is Cape Town's spiritual geography too. It stretches an arm backwards round the mountain with exploratory fingers creeping south towards Cape Point, but its body is sheltered by the mountain, and its gaze is fixed timidly, eagerly, over your shoulder towards the European lands from which you come. It looks to the north, basking in the sun, but stifling in the summer.

Soon you will want to go up Table Mountain. If your pride and strength are what they were, you will go sweatily in shorts, otherwise by the cable-railway to the little white salt-cellar you saw at the right-hand edge of the table which now transforms itself into the upper cable-station. Back at sea-level, with that over and your mind accordingly at rest, you will loiter easily a week or two, drinking tea in the mornings on a balcony on the shady side of Adderley Street, strolling under the oaks in the Gardens beyond it, occasionally taking the electric train out to False Bay, the inlet of the Indian Ocean which comes behind the mountain, where you will bathe in a sun-warmed sea. At Fish Hoek the water may easily be seventy degrees. If petrol rationing is over, a friend is sure to drive you round the peninsula, and your admiration of the sea and mountain scenery will be both expected and sincere. In suburban gardens you will see red hibiscus, blue agapanthus, giant flaming cannas, perhaps purple bougainvillea massed against white wall. In rare moments of energy you will walk among the pine-trees on the mountain slopes. You will explore a little the country round, its vineyards, its old Dutch farmhouses with their graceful curling gables. Cape Town itself has few dignified buildings, but you will find it one of the few places left on earth where you can achieve the dignity of leisure. And that is another reason why you should take Cape Town first. For dignity you will hardly see again.

When you have discovered that Cape Town is not South Africa, you will quickly book a first-class seat on the next available train for Johannesburg. You will grumble at the fare, but you will not go second, and only natives travel third. You may ruminate on this odd social and economic feature of South African life. The ordinary man, assuming him to be white—and the franchise, at any rate, shows small cognizance of other colours—will usually choose the more rather than the less expensive.

Booking at the theatre in England, you may sometimes have been disappointed at 'Nothing less than eight-and-six, sir.' In South Africa that would be impossible: the dearest seats sell first. That explains why South Africans who travel overseas think London a mighty expensive place to live in. They stay at high-priced West End hotels; they shop at the dearest shops, and think they would lose prestige if they did not. They overtip—if they tip at all. There is no established aristocracy, the ordinary man is as good as his neighbour, and only the best will do for him. All of which is very democratic—so long as you remember that the ordinary man is white. Naturally the black and the coloured, though more numerous, are not ordinary. They are something less. On the train, they *may* travel first-class—though not in the same compartment as you—if they can pay the fare. Usually the compartment reserved for such an eventuality travels empty.

Possibly you will be surprised at the slowness of your train. Travelling by car is much faster, in spite of poor roads in the large tracts of country away from the big towns. When you have got used to the country, and petrol is once more plentiful, your high-powered American car will cruise for hours at fifty or sixty, speeds to which South African trains do not aspire. It is all but a thousand miles from Cape Town to Johannesburg and your train will take about thirty-five hours. This will give you plenty of time to get used to the landscape. When you have passed through the coastal range of mountains, always glistening, in winter with snow, in summer with heat, and have slowly puffed and zigzagged on to the interior plateau, you will be in the vast semi-desert called the Karroo, where the dusty earth shows nothing but small brown shrivelled-looking bushes and range after range of low hills. Occasionally for variety a solitary hill crops up as flat as if its top had been sliced off with a knife, occasionally—very occasionally—a lone white farmhouse with its line of cypresses to break the wind, and sometimes not far from the railway track a group of dirty-looking, unkempt sheep. Once in several hours you stop at a little station with its adjacent row of corrugated-iron cottages in a thin shade of pepper-trees, and are besieged by half-naked black urchins with hands held out in prayer for pennies or scraps of food. At length the Karroo gives way to the veld (you will soon learn to spell it without the *t*), shrivelled bush to parched yellow grass. The hills disappear, but the wide open



spaces go on. Those you will have learnt to expect, but perhaps you did not expect the wide open spaces to be as empty as they are, when every tree is an event, so that you positively welcome Johannesburg when at last it appears, heralded by white and glistening mine-dumps and squalid dusty slums. As the sun catches its tall white buildings, you will be half-incredulous. After a thousand miles of next-to-nothingness, the first astonishing thing about Johannesburg is that it should be there at all; the second that, being there, it should pack all its shops and offices, its commerce and industry, into a square half-mile, or little more, of narrow, crowded streets. One of the principal daily problems for every Johannesburg business-man and shopper is where, oh where, to park his (her) car. Garages are few, and anyway the streets are public, aren't they? In the congestion and the bustle, you will speedily forget Cape Town, which if you ever revisit it, will seem to you now like a return to Europe. Not like England, of course. Like the Mediterranean? Perhaps (you decide with a shrug). But anyway, quite different from this foreign, polyglot city, which is coming, for good or ill, to represent South Africa. Under the arcadings of Johannesburg's big stores, browbeaten by its tall blocks of flats, bewildered by its straight streets, all cutting at right-angles and all exactly alike, so that your only hope of finding your way about is to learn off the names of the streets and the order in which they come—here you will forget not only Cape Town, but the veld itself, the original South Africa, which Johannesburg's street planning is quite determined that you shall not see. Some of my friends deplore this, many more are only too glad to be sheltered from the aspect of those empty, rolling, monotonous, grand and friendless plains. Fresh from England's neat and cultivated countryside, even from its crowded towns and collisions on the pavement in the blackout, you may easily feel that way too. So as you look the length of Pritchard Street, you may spare a friendly nod for the mine dump at the end, crowned nightly by a brilliant sunset, which for ever blocks your view. But occasionally, as you rush from office to cinema and cinema to dance-hall, you may momentarily regret that this big city in the middle of a vast and empty land finds space anywhere near its centre for only one tiny park, a trifle bigger, perhaps, than Russell Square. Out to the north, where the wealthy live (and they are many), Johannesburg is spacious. But there equally the veld is

denied. You will admire the elegance of roads lined with jacarandas, large houses set among trees in well-laid-out gardens. Green grass is coaxed and inexorably watered; dahlias or cannas, salvia or zinnias abound; and often, perched on solid rock, on a site to stagger your economic mind and its inevitable thought of building costs, a house looks down on terrace after terrace with rockeries full of aloes, cactuses and carefully nurtured succulents. When you find that even a house with five rooms (all on the ground floor, of course) and a jakes in the garden in one of the mother suburbs can be sold for two or three thousand pounds, you will come back towards the centre of the city and decide to look for a flat. At present you will not find one, but it is no good moving on to somewhere else. Any other town will be equally full. Perhaps one day I will go away and lend you mine. Then from high up above Pritchard Street, wandering out on to the balcony (which you will soon be calling 'stoep'), you will gaze among square blocks of concrete rising anything up to fourteen stories to the minehead which conveniently fills a gap. Glancing down, if you look so far below, you will be surprised to see, in this city of the new, a little corrugated-iron shack, dilapidated and rusty, with its solitary pepper-tree, left behind from when all this was veld. Its aged owner still sits short-sleeved in the sun on its paintless stoep, thinking, one supposes, of when Johannesburg was a mining camp. Ugly as it is, it seems a pity that even the shack is for sale. When the war is over you might buy it and build your own block of flats and wave to me across the street—though this would hardly make up for your having stolen my one little bit of view. It would be an excellent investment—and investments are what count in Johannesburg, where the key moment of the day comes in the lunch-hour, when you listen to the broadcast of the prices ruling in the stock exchange at one o'clock.

You will not find it cheap, living in Johannesburg. I am told it and Pretoria are more expensive than New York, though my own experience doesn't enable me to make the comparison. Clothes can be got without coupons but at half as much again as in London. Food used to be cheap but isn't any longer. Fruit by your standards will be plentiful. This is an excellent year for mangoes, but a shilling will buy you only three or four, or perhaps five peaches, if they are small. The price of grapes is now controlled at a maximum of sevenpence a pound, after being a

shilling for over half the season to customers who have been brought up to think them very dear at fourpence. You will rejoice to find meat, tea and butter unrationed, but your smile will fade if you (or your native boy) come back from the shop without any. Rents, luckily, are controlled at pre-war levels, but even so, if you manage to find a flat, and can afford to buy furniture to put in it, you will pay twelve to fifteen pounds for two rooms (wherefore most single people and many couples live in a flat with only one). With your flat, however, you will have an electric stove and a refrigerator, constant running hot water, and the services of a native 'boy' in a periodically white house-suit to clean for you every morning. For a tip of ten or twelve shillings a month he will also wash your dishes and possibly clean your shoes. And you will be glad to let him do that, for of course those are black men's jobs. No white South African, man or woman, could contemplate washing dishes and survive.

The 'boy' you will find considered one of the advantages of living in Johannesburg or Durban rather than in Cape Town. In Cape Town you would have a 'girl', but she would be difficult to get, need careful handling, since she would know you couldn't do without her, and would vanish in the evening to look after her own house and family. Your 'boy' will live on the roof or in the basement. He has a family, too, but they are far away, in the northern Transvaal or Zululand. He sends them money regularly out of his monthly five pounds, visits them every two or three years, when the roof of their hut wants thatching or he has scraped up enough savings to buy a little leisure, and then returns to start all over again and to hear a few months later that his wife has another child.

Your 'girl' at the Cape would not be a native (Bantu), but a 'coloured' girl, that is a member of that half-breed race, mixture of Bantu and Hottentot, Malay and European, which seems to have been brought into the world to do all the domestic and manual labour of the Cape. You will see few of them in the Transvaal, many fewer indeed than Indians, whom you will often observe in their little greengrocers' shops, or sometimes in the street—women in gay-coloured saris or a boy, perhaps, wearing a fez. To see *many* Indians you would have to go to Durban; the Transvaal rejoices to leave the Indian 'problem' to Natal. In Johannesburg most of the faces which are not white will be

beneath the black woolly hair of the Bantu. The Bantu you will see nearly everywhere you go. Enormous washerwomen stride past with bundles on their heads and babies on their backs. Workmen sit in the gutter in the lunch-hour playing games with draughts or bits of stone. Errand-boys in khaki uniforms, bare-foot domestics in blouse and shorts, and crowds of other black people, not a few in filthy rags—they will brush against you on the pavement—and occasionally one will get cuffed by some young white ruffian, though you yourself may mind the jostle of a black man less than the lighted cigarette-end which falls from an upper window as you pass. They will not be in the cinemas ('Europeans only', your ticket may say, in case there should be any doubt, though there is none), nor, except as servants, in restaurants or the houses of your friends. Nor will they ride beside you on the bus or tram (if you are so plebeian as to use those modes of transport), as your coloured servant might in Cape Town—whence many Cape Town people prefer the suburban railway, which at least has separate classes. In Johannesburg natives have special trams, aluminium-coloured instead of red; or by favour of the conductor they may ride on your tram upstairs at the back.

You will be astonished to discover that most of these black people do not live in Johannesburg. Unless they live on their employer's premises—in a hutch in the back garden (never inside the house)—they must live outside the city, in native townships or 'locations' like Orlando. If you go to Orlando, you can see some thousands of little detached brick houses set out in straight rows, each with its two little rooms for its family of native occupants, its little rectangle of garden in front, but *no* kitchen, bathroom, pantry, cupboards, ceiling, floor, light, water (except in the street, one tap to five houses). But Orlando is the most lordly of the native townships and will seem like Paradise when you have seen, as somewhere or other you easily may, natives living in a shed put together from bits of tin, with a sheet of corrugated iron for a roof held on by a boulder at each corner.

Of the native children in the Transvaal (and the other provinces may be taken to be much the same) seventy per cent do not go to school. Most of those who do leave when they have learnt as much as the average European child of nine or ten. A few adult natives are rescued from illiteracy in the handful of night-schools, which are run two or three nights a week by tired

and devoted white school teachers, university students, and even enthusiastic fourth-form boys. The actual achievement of these altruistic people is small, but no more pathetic than any other small attempt to remedy a great evil. High education is not entirely barred. Orlando has its native high school, and in the lecture-rooms of the University of the Witwatersrand you may see an occasional native mingling with the other students on equal terms. Natives may also take the degree examinations of the University of South Africa, though they will sit in separate rooms. (One recent examination put its candidates in three rooms—Europeans, non-Europeans, and Chinese.)

If you bring your son with you, he of course will go to high school; and you can set against your big household bills the fact that he will go there free of charge. There he will meet lots of others like himself with only a slightly different accent and a little more tan to their skins. But he will meet no little Afrikaners, for the grandsons of the Boers against whom your father fought attend a different school, where the lessons take place in Afrikaans. Your son will learn Afrikaans, and will probably find it quite as irksome as you in your schooldays found French. Yet if he stays and present government plans mature, in five years time he will not only be taught Afrikaans but have to use it as the language medium for half his other lessons. You will probably hear much talk about this plan for bilingual schools, which has been for several years the dream of a few enthusiasts with ideals of racial co-operation. Perhaps you will be surprised to find that the immediate result of the Government's sponsorship of the scheme has been rather to exacerbate than mitigate racial animosities. Among independent and proud-spirited people compulsion does have that effect. Many Afrikaners are afraid for the future of their own language if their children are made to talk English as well as Afrikaans; and you yourself may feel a similar distrust, a fear that your son's education may in the end be sacrificed.

You will see Afrikaans along with English on many of the street signs and on every official notice. But in Johannesburg you will hardly ever hear it in the shops or about the streets. On the tram? Perhaps, on rare occasions when you take the tram to Newlands or Melville, suburbs of the Afrikaans working or lower middle class. Or the conductor may speak it to the driver, though he will address you in English, if he speaks to you at all. So you



will probably not learn Afrikaans. Yet you would be wise to do so if you intend travelling much in country areas (the 'platteland', or, with some disparagement, 'backveld'). Not that you will not be understood if you persist in speaking English, but you will probably be disliked. This will puzzle you at first; for you will know that the present pro-British government is made up largely of Afrikaners, and you will have come across many Afrikaners who are proud to have fought on Britain's side in the war and glad to call an Englishman their friend. But by degrees, as you go about the country and hear whispers of what is said in the Afrikaans papers, which you will not read, you will know what it means to feel unwanted—hated even, not for yourself as an individual but as a member of the nation to which you happen to belong. With sorrow you will come to a keener understanding of the sort of racial problem which has in the past made things difficult in eastern and central Europe—the Sudetenland, for example—and is certain to do so again. Perhaps that is one reason why, as a student of social and political problems, you should come.

You will not, then, I expect, be very comfortable in your mind in South Africa, but physically you can be comfortable enough in Johannesburg, so long as you have money. And the climate is superb. There are half-a-dozen or so days in the year when the sun does not shine. For weeks on end the thermometer goes above eighty every day without touching ninety as much as once a year. In contrast to Cape Town, where it rains in winter, the highveld goes in for violent summer thunderstorms accompanied by brilliant spectacles of lightning. The winter is dry and sunny, with a hard bright light, and though it may freeze now and then, you will rarely think of putting on an overcoat before evening. A youth about to pay his first visit overseas confided to me: 'Shall I have to wear a vest? I've never worn one yet.' But don't think you will never be cold in Johannesburg. You will suffer much indoors—from the superstitions of acquaintances who believe that a fire in a house is unhealthy, a fire in the day time positively degenerate, and suffocation the inevitable nemesis upon the opening of a window. You will be polite as always; but budding friendships have been nipped by little more than this.

As for the friendships you will make, I think you had better be left to make them yourself. Forgive me if I seem to have dwelt

too long on the people you will move among but will not 'meet'. You will understand why when you get here. For to anyone who doesn't take it for granted, the colour-bar is easily the most conspicuous feature of South African life. I have not bothered you with details about malnutrition or the restrictive native pass laws. If you come, you will soon find out about those, or you can read about them, in, say, *The Black Man's Burden*, by John Burger. Nor have I even completed the tale of the racial medley. But then, in comparison to the colour-bar, it matters very little that you should know, for example, that of the white population of Johannesburg roughly a tenth are Jews. They are not liked, of course, though they get on better than in most places. They are prominent among doctors and lawyers, in some retail trades, in the theatre, in all left-wing groups, and on every single committee which engages in social work or helps the natives. Such committees are not few: don't imagine that Johannesburg is conscienceless or that you will not find a very enlightened intelligentsia with whom to discuss all that is up to date in literature, music, politics or social affairs. You will. They may not know about *HORIZON*, but they will all read their *New Statesman*. So you may expect numbers of liberal and internationally minded people to set against those intellectuals from the Afrikaans universities who use 'liberal' as a term of reproach.

I may as well confess that Afrikaans literature, which you naturally want to know about, puts me in a difficulty. One can't ignore it and I am not competent to say very much about it, though it is clear that a young and robust people, intensely self-conscious about its culture, provides a ready market for anything readable in its own language. Adventure stories, detective stories and thrillers with South African settings are conscientiously turned out for the masses who would otherwise have no popular fiction. The number of Afrikaans novels published annually has doubled in the last five years; but in order not to give a false impression, one should add that the number is now about eighty and that in 1941 (a peak year, before the paper shortage had serious effect) the number of *books* (not of novels) published in South Africa in all languages was 435. The more serious Afrikaans novels deal with such subjects as the social and family complications that ensue when an Afrikaner falls in love outside his own race, the financial collapse of a farmer who finally has to sell out

to a Jewish storekeeper, the tragedy of a family who discover that they have native blood. For something more cosmopolitan in outlook (those who seem to know talk about Dutch influences) and more modernistic in technique (without knowing Afrikaans you can gauge a little from watching the irregular lines of some of the poems in the Afrikaans journals) you should turn rather to the poets, notably the brothers Louw, or of course Uys Krige, South Africa's most interesting poet at the moment, who writes both in Afrikaans and English. His experiences in Spain, the Western Desert and the prison-camp put him in touch with a wide modern audience, and you will find little that seems strange, though much that is novel, in his imagery and his experimental metres. Yet his rhythms have a tempo and sometimes an elaboration not common in modern English verse. You will have come across examples of his work before now in HORIZON; but you will not get the most out of his poems until you have heard him read them.

Most South African writers in English tend to have a sense of frustration. Their home market is very small: don't forget that Manchester and Liverpool between them could just about house the South African public for English books. The Afrikaans public is no bigger; but unlike the Afrikaners, English writers must compete with all the latest books from England and America. A South African imprint does not help—rather the reverse, for if the book was any good, one thinks, an overseas publisher would have accepted it. It is taken for granted that the author would prefer that; and since all writers like a wide public and big sales, of course he would. His eyes are turned to London, or at least to Europe, and if he can he goes there. Writers like Roy Campbell and William Plomer, whose work you will know as well as I, are hardly South African any more.

It is the same with actors, and even more with actresses, who not unnaturally regard their local stage as the platform from which trains leave for the West End, if one can only manage to get on them. The war, however, sent a few trains in the reverse direction. The arrival of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and the return, for a space, of Leontine Sagan began a boom in the South African theatre; and South Africans like Marda Vanne and Nan Munro are at present acting and producing before their own compatriots. The standard of amateur acting strikes me as extremely

high in Johannesburg, where you will fare better for the theatre than in all but one or two of the provincial English cities. Unfortunately the interest in acting is much greater than in drama. I have known an actor spend longer rehearsing a spotlight effect than the delivery of his lines. And audiences applaud the acting and the sets rather than the play. One society advertised a discussion—I assume in all seriousness—on whether the author, the actor, or the producer contributes most to the play. The Johannesburg Repertory Players, with a subscribing membership running into four figures and a waiting list of applicants, is sure of its audience whatever it cares to give them, and therefore has immense opportunities—not to say responsibilities—in the matter of elevating public taste. It has been known to do O'Neill and Pirandello with some success, and it promised well for 1944 by starting off with *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *The Rivals*; but noticed nothing incongruous—and what is worse, was about as well received—when later in the year it descended to the puerilities of *Life with Father* and *Cottage to Let*. (Puer—boy, age perhaps eleven.) The Press does not help. Standards of criticism are at a low ebb, as they say, except that an ebb presumes a flow; and the only possible sign of that is, I should say, in *Trek*, a progressive Cape Town fortnightly, which is achieving a circulation.

The attraction of bad plays is in most cases that they have been successful in London or New York. This attraction is a real one and not altogether to be despised. South Africa goes to the best shops, but may not have the discernment to get served with the best goods. So anything you can do to improve the taste of London may have its reflex here. For English culture in South Africa is a provincial culture, looking to its metropolis overseas. And this is inevitable. The alternative would be for South Africa to cut itself adrift not only from the other English-speaking countries—the bond, however, is too strong—but from the rest of the modern world. Yet one of the saddest sights in South Africa is the label 'Imported' flaunted in a shop window. That is not, like 'Made in Germany', a government-decreed stigma protecting local industry. It is an unashamed advertisement.

## POINTS FROM LETTERS

### GERMANY, BY A GERMAN

... 'The story of the occupation, in this zone at any rate, is, in my opinion, a story of a tremendous opportunity totally missed. Two things were needed: reconstruction as an aim, and firm guidance in carrying it through. The Germans are not interested in "democracy" which, under the circumstances, is not a serious proposition; they do not care for the interplay of parties which, under the circumstances, can only be an empty shadow of real party politics. And they are therefore not at all impressed by having parties again. But they were as ready to obey Americans and Englishmen as they were ready to obey Nazis. In fact, as always, they were eager to show their efficiency, discipline, their will to work under the new masters as under the old. They got no guidance, they were not told what to do in the task of reconstruction, they were not in any way integrated into the Western world, but instead were left to dream of the "good old days" of Hitler. I do not think for a moment that, for a very long time to come, Germany could be a political power able to threaten anybody. But I do think that in her slow and terrible disintegration she is becoming a centre of moral infection and economic decay for the Continent and for the world. It is impossible to let the second biggest economic power of the world, the biggest European nation on the Continent, rot, without a consequent spreading of the decay far beyond the borders of Germany. Here, nobody seems to think of all this, largely because everybody except those who would not find a job at home is thinking of one thing only, to wit, how to get home. I understand—at least it is the common opinion of Germans—that in the North-Western zone all this is much better. I think it is probably so, and at any rate I dearly hope so. . . .'

Germany. 3 April 1946.

### ENGLAND, BY A FRENCHMAN

... 'Je vous écris la joie profonde que j'ai ressentie de mon séjour à Londres . . .'  
... 'Pour la première fois, depuis six ans, j'ai trouvé un pays libre, des hommes libres, ayant un goût pour la discussion d'idées et une horreur de l'âpreté. Comme le malade qui entre en convalescence éprouve à nouveau et plus fermement que jamais la joie de vivre, celui qui a vécu quatre ans sous l'oppression et qui voit son pays revenir, trop lentement à son gré, vers un climat de liberté, est absolument bouleversé par la vie anglaise dès qu'il a la chance d'y être mêlé . . .'

Paris. 16 April 1946.

### ON THE BANNED WAGON

... 'In the *Stars and Stripes* I read that over 50,000 G.I.s asked for my books in Paris alone. Two months after invasion over 10,000 copies of the banned books had been sold. Ten thousand of each were printed (15,000 of French



*Capricorn*). Montadori of Italy publishing the two *Cancers* and *Black Spring* very soon, soon as translated. Requests for rights from Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Spain, Brazil, Greece, Argentina, Egypt and Palestine (last for Hebrew translation) . . .

HENRY MILLER. California. 11 April 1946.

### THE AMERICAN THEATRE

. . . 'I have, by the way, thought of sending you an article on theater, to be followed a bit later by one on literature; separate articles, not Letters. But the theater article lies on my desk, only about one-fourth done. . . . Too bad, though, for our theater is getting exciting again. The season has been poor, but several dramatists (Maxwell Anderson and Irwin Shaw among them) have attacked the critics and the critics' stranglehold on the theater (an American theater is the N.Y. stage; our regional theater is weak, due to the influence of the slick movies that create bad standards for both the public and the provincial acting companies) . . . the funny thing is, that both playwrights and critics are right: the dramatists are right in saying the critics are bad, for most of them are, and the critics are right in saying these recent plays are lousy, for they are. However, we all look forward to the advent of the Old Vic, which Beatrice Straight is bringing over; this will help charge the theater with vitality. For we need *background*—whatever our playwrights have to say lacks force because they have no sense of form and have no real gift of theatrical rhetoric: and we don't have a heroic acting tradition that induces the writing of first-class plays. Most of our actors are untrained hicks who have a gawky kind of charm, like Cooper or Stewart, and their popularity has set a standard of non-acting. . . . I'm trying to say all this in the goddam article that won't get finished. Also, I wanted to tell in some detail about the thrilling new race-problems play which opens on Broadway on 1 May, called *On Whitman Avenue*. It will star that fine Negro actor, Canada Lee, who recently played Caliban; and it's directed by Margo Jones, who helped direct *The Glass Menagerie*, our only good play in years. A current success, *Deep are the Roots*, a melodrama of race relations, has jinxed other plays on the subject: the sensational novel *Strange Fruit* didn't last long on the stage, neither did *Jeb*, by Bob Ardrey, who wrote *Thunder Rock* (another Wilder student). *On Whitman Avenue* is a far more skilful play than *Deep are the Roots*; I was on a trip to Washington not long ago and heard Canada Lee read it to Henry Wallace and other Washington liberals, and it sounded wonderful. It's about a Negro family moving into a white neighbourhood and then being forced to move out again. Just that—and it makes its statements dramatically rather than rhetorically. It's a little Ibsen-like and as good as the early Lillian Hellman; the white people who force the Negroes to move destroy themselves in various ways; the effect of the elders' action on their children is particularly sinister. Ironically, the only out-of-town theater the company could book before the N.Y. opening is in race-touchy Detroit!—Canada Lee is a superb actor, fluently emotional; you may have seen his fine performance as the steward who read the Psalm in the movie *Lifeboat* (Tallulah Bankhead). I was lucky

to be able to play Iago to Canada's Othello in an informal Washington production (at Caresse Crosby's gallery) last year, and thought him much more tragic, less statuesque in the part than Robeson. It will be interesting to watch the career of *On Whitman Avenue*; the cast treats it religiously. . . .

Florida, U.S.A. 6 April 1946.

### MAGNA GRÆCIA

... 'Your suggestion for excavating a Greek site in Southern Italy is magnificent. Why not start a fund? But if Sybaris is too expensive—I have been there and agree it would be—what about Metaponton? It is more famous than the Sele site because it was the centre of Pythagoreanism, the most mysterious and tantalizing of Greek cults. Its cemetery might contain extraordinary finds such as the gold orphic tablets found—was it?—at Laeri. It would be quite easy to excavate if one chose the non-malarial season. I spent an afternoon walking over the site which is thick with potsherds, and picked up two sixth-century coins without making any particular search.

'At the only house within a mile—a filthy hovel where we spent the night—the only food they gave us to eat was beans! But if the excavations are to be a war memorial, then they should be combined with a drainage scheme for draining the marsh where a particularly deadly mosquito breeds. Then a rich stretch of soil would be restored to cultivation again and something done for the peasants as well as for art and archæology. . . .'

GERALD BRENNAN. Aldbourne. 23 March 1946.

### HOLLYWOOD'S PAINTING COMPETITION

... 'I was instrumental in arranging an important art competition for a forthcoming film, *Bel Ami*, to be produced and directed by Al Lewin, who did such an effective job with *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

'In this connexion, as you probably know by this time, eleven artists have participated, each doing a major painting. The artists are: Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Ivan Albright (who did the disintegrated Dorian portrait), Delvaux, Carrington, Tanning, Stanley Spencer, Guglielmi, Rattner, Eugene Berman, and Horace Pippin.

'Since all of these artists did their very best work for the competition, and since the terms are most unusual for an art competition in this country, the whole event has had and is still having considerable publicity in the general Press as well as in that of the art world.

'The exhibition will tour this country and then is scheduled for England. This will be after the release of the film in the fall.

'I have done a major article for *Arts and Architecture* on the competition and on the paintings submitted. The theme, incidentally, is the Temptation of Saint Anthony, which our painters literally 'ate up' because of surrealist over-tone. The judges were: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Marcel Duchamp and Sidney Janis. The winner: Max Ernst. . . .'

New York City. 3 May 1946.

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